

RED DUST OF AFRICA

By the same author

NOBLE PURPOSE

SUNSET IN THE EAST

HOLIDAY FROM LIFE

THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP

PIGS I HAVE KNOWN

THE LION AND FRANCIS CONWAY

Red Dust of Africa

by

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Sacha Carnegie 1919

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**To all in Africa who made my journey pleasant,
amusing and exciting; especially Kalaka and
Kiboi and the bull buffalo I never found.**

**Very few of the characters in this book are fictitious,
it's no use pretending they are, but many are greatly
altered, in speech, gesture and action.**

'The use of travelling is to regulate imagination by reality, and instead of thinking how things may be, to see them as they are.'

DOCTOR JOHNSON
(*Johnsoniana: Piozzi, 154*)

THE station at Beira was bedlam, but infinitely preferable to the town itself, set down higgledy-piggledy on flat, swampy ground by the waters of the Indian Ocean. I had meant to stay awhile in the place but one look was enough and now I was desperate to find a train—any train—and quite careless about its destination.

The platform was exceedingly hot and dusty and the noise frantic. A Union-Castle boat had berthed the day before and on every side pushing and shoving were perspiring, red-faced passengers. They all appeared to possess the most enormous wooden packing cases labelled 'Not Wanted on Voyage.' What was worse, they all appeared to be waving ticket reservations.

I had nothing, and after six weeks in the escapist atmosphere of a cargo boat I felt ill-prepared to cope with life's little problems on my own without the efficient assistance of the purser. A queue had formed snaking between the packing cases. I joined it, tagging on behind a group of jolly men in shirtsleeves, trying to keep an eye on my two suitcases and the minute African who had made himself responsible for their safety. Not very far away a child was sick over somebody else's packing case.

The queue inched towards the little opening in the brick wall; above us the sun excelled itself and there was no shade. Everyone shouted or sat on their luggage and mopped at their red necks and peeling noses; a lot of children ran about quite out of control and a row of Africans squatted along the wall chewing and spitting. I wished very much that I was still on board drinking iced lager with the chief engineer, or, better still, fast asleep on my bunk.

"That was a damned good party last night," said one of the jolly men!

"You can say that again. Best evening of the trip."

"I come back this way after every leave and this station never improves."

"Ruddy disgrace!"

"What can you expect from a crowd of Portuguesees?"

"Roll on, Lusaka." They mopped in unison as though controlled by some central brain.

Lusaka . . . I wanted to get to Lusaka . . . in time. My visa allowed me twenty days in which to potter through Mozambique. But money was the problem; I wanted to keep the little I had for Rhodesia and Kenya. It was nearly my turn.

"First class to Lusaka, booked in the name of Appleforth. Yes, *Exeter Castle*, that's right. No, five. Myself, my wife and three children." I pitied him. It was bad enough coping with oneself in that shambles. I felt sticky and unshaven and very thirsty.

"Your turn, laddie," said the man, turning away, his hands full of papers and *escudos* notes.

"Hard luck, Arthur!" yelled someone. "Hoped we'd all be together."

"Señor?" said a dark saturnine face peering through the little window.

"Oh, ah—yes." Africa was mine. Where should I go first?

"Please, Señor, many waiting." It was a choice between Lagos, Addis Ababa, Stanleyville, Khartoum; a freckled girl behind me cleared her throat rudely and sighed aloud: "Really!"

"Lusaka," I said in a panic. Is this how destiny works?

"You have booking?"

"No." He consulted a list.

"You are from *Exeter Castle*?" I shook my head.

"How you come here then?" It seemed unimportant compared to how I was to get away. I told him.

"City of Zanzibar? Is she in harbour?"

"As far as I know."

"And you have no booking?"

"I have no booking."

"It can be arranged."

"That's something." The heat glanced off the tin roof fiercely on to my head.

"Oh, really!" snapped little Miss Freckles with another exaggerated sigh.

"First?"

"Yes." Second is all right for short distances, someone in the boat had said, third apparently unthinkable, and fourth entirely black.

I sat on my suitcases, drawing moodily at a straw stuck into a bottle of tepid Pepsi-Cola, until the train backed slowly in. Bedlam turned to lunacy at the sight of the train. Adult voices screeched wildly for children; one particular pea-hen call I can still hear cutting through the din.

"David," it repeated again and again, **"David, you dreadful little beast, come here to Mother!"** Africans scampered hither and thither picking up luggage, putting it down, snatching it from one another.

I waited till the maddened frenzy had abated and most of the passengers were inside the carriages before moving to find coach G. My very small African staggered along with the cases, his spindle-legs bent in two small bows.

The Union-Castle contingent found it necessary to tear up and down the corridors telling one another at the very pitch of their lungs, where they were installed, laughing and whooping hysterically, filling every inch of space with waving red arms, fat thighs and large floppy sunhats.

In compartment G, I found a morose youth dressed in a green blazer and amazingly short shorts, sitting staring out of the window at a goods truck. On the seat beside him sat a sensible rucksack and a square camera. On most

of the trains in Africa the first-class compartments contain four bunks, two of which fold tidily out of the way in the daytime. In this particular Portuguese carriage the upholstery was tastefully clothed in green leather, plus much chromium and glass and little handles for switching on and off various lights and things. Everything smelt new.

I tried to open the window.

"It's jammed," said the youth dully.

"Still, it's nice and cool in here, anyway."

"Air conditioning." He had carrotty hair and very pale grey eyes and spoke with the accent of the Cape.

Strange as it seems, we got away on time, just before dusk, and my first view of Africa proper as opposed to the coastline was exactly as it should have been: palms leaning across a furnace sky, and below them a cluster of low beehive huts. We sat without speaking, seeing our reflections growing clearer on the slowly darkening glass. The train rattled slowly between banks of tall grass; palms and exotic feathery trees passed across our view, silhouetted briefly by the dying fire behind them.

To savour the moment more fully I went to stand on the bucketing platform between the carriages. In the open the heat was oppressive; in the carriage the temperature was that of an early autumn night at home. Fireflies seethed above swamps where frogs croaked and boomed; farther back from the line, fires glowed among sudden clumps of trees and figures moved between little white huts. It was all very reminiscent of Malaya.

Africa jolted slowly by, and often the wheels rumbled on short girder bridges above glinting rivers. When the sun had gone, black storm clouds massed in the west, lightning playing and flickering magnificently in their depths.

As always at the start of adventuring, I found it hard to believe that I was really there; that after weeks of planning and anticipation I was truly on my way, trundling

forward into the Dark Continent. My feeling of excitement was immoderate; at any moment I might begin to sing or leap about in a mad fashion.

So I returned to the compartment to find the young Afrikaner even more morose, sucking a fountain pen and glaring angrily at some forms on the window table. He had put on a scarf of a revolting colour; his knees were quite blue.

"These are a lot of damned nonsense, man."

We filled them in together. Then we ate some dangerous looking meat pies he had bought in Beira. He became more chummy, and told me he was going to the Falls for a day and then straight back to Cape Town—"Man, there's a town for you!" I thought him enterprising, if a little dull.

After a while I went back outside to get warm and see a bit more of Portuguese East. The storm was flaring and blazing all along the horizon, but silently without thunder; from somewhere came the unnecessary sound of men singing 'Ikley Moor'. A black attendant passed me carrying a bundle of blankets. He did not grin like they do in Hollywood films, but merely looked sullen and harassed.

Young Afrikaner snuggled into his blankets and almost at once began to snore disgustingly. I put on corduroy trousers, a fisherman's jersey and an extra pair of socks. No one even pretended to bring me bedding. I searched the corridors for the sullen black man; from every closed and darkened door came the sounds of deep repose. Towards dawn I woke Afrikaner and pointed out my plight.

"You need a bedding ticket," he said and was instantly asleep. I covered myself with an array of shirts, jackets and a copy of the local paper which I discovered under the seat, and made do till the Customs Officer came aboard an hour before Umtali. He gave me a long and searching look, pushing back his official cap to scratch his head in a puzzled way.

Then his place was taken by an immigration man with the sharpest little eyes imaginable; between them they took away all our forms. Relieved, I put back my small automatic pistol at the bottom of the case, feeling dreadfully wicked and cosmopolitan.

At Umtali we bundled out on to a cold cheerless platform where we queued at a stall, ate fried eggs off small plates balanced on our knuckles, and drank thick sweet tea. The air was very different, for here we were some four thousand feet up and the peeling noses were pinched. I tried to change my remaining *escudos* but no one wanted them; but at least I bought a bedding ticket. Later I discovered it would not be needed on this next stage and that I'd have to get another at Salisbury.

We spent long enough in Umtali to see many beautiful shrubs growing in the gardens of small tin bungalows and a spreading scarlet poinsettia beside a dilapidated garage, the creeping purple glory of bougainvillæa doing its best to hide a scurfy yellow wall. Tall, rocky hills climbed steeply beyond the town, jagged and harsh. A great many Africans had bicycles. I saw my first genuine bush hat, above a beard, too.

Afrikaner and I were still together, but we had shed some of the Union-Castle lot, who went off in dusty shooting-brakes, waving vigorously to friends of what must have been a pretty dreadful voyage.

Soon another train, a Rhodesian train with less gleaming chromium and no green leather, towed by twin Diesels, set off through the mountainous country towards Salisbury.

The way grew steep and tortuous, the line climbing, twisting, curling, falling among mountains strewn with giant boulders; sometimes those monstrous chunks of rock were balanced one on top of each other, and one wondered briefly how on earth such a thing could have happened. I stood on the open platform, my camera at the

ready, listening to the frequent squeal of the brakes as the long train shuddered down the steep slopes; we stopped at most of the little halts and each nameboard showed that we had climbed a few more hundred feet. As we drew away from the stops, masses of African children scurried along shouting for "swits, swits!" Their small flat noses ran almost as fast as their owners and many of them had scabrous sores on their legs.

A kind woman next door dropped the remains of sandwiches into the raised pink palms, and the infants stopped to gather round the debris of bread and jam and potted meat, squabbling furiously.

Scrubby forests clung to the mountains and below on the lower slopes cattle, long-horned and thin, grazed off brownish grass; beehive huts sprouted from the dry dusty landscape, built of grass and mud and, where civilisation had laid its hand, of shiny tin put up in sections like pig dwellings in richer lands—very sterile, very hygienic.

Above was not the sky I had expected, blue from horizon to horizon, but one blanketed with heavy clouds moving slowly across the sun; in the far distance it looked as though rain was falling. But when the sun did appear, its touch was fiery, burning white-hot holes in the clouds. I stood on the swaying platform, my face raised like that of some pagan worshipper, gulping down the sunshine. Every now and then pieces of toffee paper floated by from the next compartment, falling from grubby fingers at the end of a lobster-red arm.

Inyazura: three thousand, nine hundred and ninety-eight feet above the Indian Ocean; gradually we crept up to five thousand and over, and the air had a different feel, the sun burned cleaner as in mountains everywhere. We stopped at Eagle's Nest while a restaurant car was produced from nowhere and hitched to our tail. A gang of railway workers did things with levers and sledgehammers, watched over by a white foreman roasted black as themselves. He wore his shorts turned back from the

knees and a dingy cloth hanging from his broad hat to shade his neck and shoulders, like a Foreign Legionnaire. He bought beer from the dining car, broke off the neck of the bottle on a stone and poured fizzy froth into his upturned mouth. He looked tough and self-assured in his huge boots and rolled socks, and in the swagger of his gait.

I saw my first vultures, circling lazily above an arid hill, and a raven with cruel beak and white neck had alighted on a telegraph pole to croak hideously, in perfect keeping with the harshness of the countryside. The clouds were melting into wisps, the sun was winning, and I took refuge in the air conditioning. Afrikaner thought little of the scenery.

"Nothing like the Union, man!" The phrase grew faintly monotonous. I caught myself longing for him to be transferred miraculously in a puff of smoke to Cape Town or Durban or Pretoria.

I remembered a journey through Yugoslavia and Hungary, and myself, a spotty youth of eighteen, comparing everything unfavourably with the scenery and life at home. This is one of the penalties of nationalities and flags I suppose.

Afrikaner had never before been outside South Africa, so this trip was really something of a stepping-stone. After a while he retired into his gaudy paperback and so missed our gradual grinding descent to the flat lands. The line ran parallel to the main road; every so often a car, usually piled high with dusty luggage, went tearing by, or a lorry piled high with dusty Africans.

There were cattle to see and signs of a richer fertility—better fences, better farm houses, a more open land ranchland. As we approached Salisbury the flow of cars increased to a steady stream of worker ants scurrying home in the eventide, determined in the way of worker ants everywhere not to waste a second of precious time.

"You see more cars going out of Joburg. Hell, man, it's a better road!"

I only saw Salisbury in the dark and not much of it at that. I strolled with Afrikaner through the balmy dusk, through the public gardens where coloured water cascaded and sprayed in illuminated fountains and the air was heavy with the fragrance of various exciting plants. We wandered rather aimlessly along broad streets, peering into shops, through the large windows of Meikle's Hotel at the healthy-looking people drinking beer and gins; we searched for some kind of cheap restaurant and were barred from the only one we found, because Afrikaner was not properly dressed. That made him irritable and more Nationalistic than ever.

I began to feel excessively ill, feverish from an old leg trouble, and I dragged along beside him longing for oblivion. He was young and strapping and hungry and, as the fever mounted, became steadily more so. We gave up the search and went back to the station restaurant. I sat in a flaming stupor while he ordered a series of the most revolting things like steak and kidney pie and trifle. I toyed with some nondescript soup while he talked of his home and family and girl friends: I believe he attempted to show me photographs of a girl; I really cannot remember, for by then I could scarcely see through prickling red-rimmed eyes and a brain of seething cottonwool—

‘Head like a stove, and mouth like a drain
And a kind of dull, all-overish pain,’

somebody's very able description of fever.

Two harmless-looking black gentlemen, neatly and soberly dressed, came in and sat at a corner table minding their own business. A brick-red family of Pa, Ma and three kids got up in the middle of their meal and walked out with a great show of indignation. It was all very embarrassing and I was sorry for the Africans and in a way for the white party for making such an exhibition of themselves. But Afrikaner took a dim view of the pair in the corner and sat glaring, mentally swishing his *zambok*.

"You'd never see this in the Union, man!" "To Hell with the Union!" I almost said. To hell with everything except a bottle of aspirin and sleep!

My stay in Salisbury was not a success. I must go back there and see it in daylight, by myself and feeling well.

"Ah," sighed Afrikaner with well-filled satisfaction. "I needed that."

We sat on a porter's barrow to wait for the Bulawayo train and, my goodness, how he talked!

[2]

THERE is no line direct from Salisbury to Lusaka, a distance of about two hundred and fifty miles as the bushman trots, and so the train meanders south to Bulawayo, thence north-east to Livingstone, and then finally turns north-west for Lusaka, extending the journey into a round trip of some nine hundred miles.

The stretch from Salisbury to Bulawayo was memorable only for the fact that the man in the bunk opposite me had eyes exactly the same colour as his bow tie—yellow, spotted with pink—and also that he removed his false teeth and placed them reverently in a brown paper bag beneath the bunk. The fourth member of the compartment never once opened his mouth except to advise us he thought he was starting 'flu'. The fever heated to flashpoint and then subsided with a rush.

Afrikaner opened the window sometime during the night, and by morning we were knee-deep in smuts. But the teeth were all right, grinning in their paper bag, so that was something. My bout of fever had gone, leaving me like chewed string and despondent at the thought of a whole day in Bulawayo.

However, by giving a beaming black man a shilling I was able to relax in a moderately hot bath. While on the

subject of plumbing it might not be out of place to mention that the Bulawayo station lavatory must surely scoop any prize for pornographic art. Pompeii could not live with it.

The town itself is neat and roomy and tidy. I wandered up and down the main thoroughfares; I looked into the shops; I enjoyed the furore of a minor accident at a crossing—no one was injured and there was plenty of glass and recrimination, and it all took up half an hour or so.

I sat on a bench in the gardens in the shade of colourful trees and watched a pretty brown nurserymaid pushing a very young *bwana* in his pram, just as I might have done in Kensington Gardens; pigeons flew about, and ragged bare-footed men with thin scaly legs swept the dust into ridges. Then I went to the museum to take in the local history and colour.

The quiet, cool corridors of the museum were welcome after the heat of the streets, and the glass cases full of interesting things most skilfully arranged. In fact, in the excellence of its exhibits the Bulawayo museum was very nearly on a par with that of Lourenço Marques, and that is indeed saying something.

The animals and the birds were amazingly realistic; you expected them to come battering at the glass. The lions looked out from long brittle grass, and snakes of every conceivable colour squirmed from under rocks or hung curled round branches; vultures tore at the bloodstained corpse of some unfortunate antelope; and the wart-hog was the dead spit of a Free French general I once met.

I stared up with awe into the piggy glass eye of a wrinkled elephant and then into the snarling jaws of a leopard, crouching on a flat rock by the side of a beautifully painted river. Close behind me a little lad with adenoids remarked in a piercing blocked-up treble that he didn't like anything in the museum and why couldn't they go home.

Carved wooden figures showed off a splendid display of tribal dress: feathers, monkey skins, lions' tails, bangles and

beads; copper spears, short stabbing assegais and slender throwing-spears; drums and horns and efficient knobkerries; lion-maned headdresses and exotic feather boas and long hide-shields—all the barbaric splendour of savagery.

In the relic section I saw Rhodes' medals, his levee dress and the Union Jack that covered his coffin, and much else besides.

I saw the relics from the Shangani massacre where the Matabele surrounded Major Wilson and thirty-four men, killing them all after a forlorn and desperate stand. A revolver, a few pieces of equipment, a small leather case of rusty surgical needles and catgut, that was all. A picture on the wall showed the last survivors standing back to back firing pistols among the trunks of great trees surrounded by smoke and the dead and the surging, victorious warriors.

Such pictures always affect me slightly, however badly they are drawn: lump-in-the-throat pictures, like Boy Cornwall waiting for orders and Custer's Last Stand. This one was spoilt by the whiny boy suddenly shrieking for chocolate from his mother who wore flat sandals, whose flip-flap, flip-flap had dogged me every step all the way round. Three African girls in gay print frocks stared for a long time at Rhodes' levee outfit, speechless till they broke into raucous stifled giggles which attracted the frowning attention of an attendant who shooed them out, returned to his chair in the corner cluck-clucking to himself.

"They'd never behave like that in the Union," he said to anyone who cared to listen.

I nipped ahead of the mother and son to feast my eyes in peace upon a case stuffed with bits of broken pottery, then I went to the Grand Hotel and had lunch. There were more waiters than guests; they wore snappy little bolero waistcoats, red fezes, and sashes across their chests like senior N.C.O.s. Huge fans revolved slowly above the tables. Near by a florid man interested himself loudly in a

large helping of curry. It was any hot-country hotel. I sat back replete. Now what?

There was still the afternoon to be got through and then the evening, for the train for Lusaka did not leave till eight.

I suppose, looking back on the day, I ought really to have hired a taxi and gone to see Rhodes' Tomb or Lobengula's Tree or some inspiring view. Instead I went to the cinema and sat among a lot of very uninhibited Rhodesian youths in Hitler-Jugend shorts, sporting crew-cuts; they kicked the seats quite often, whistled, catcalled and shouted very uninhibited remarks to each other. I heard no more than the louder parts of the film. Still, it was better than the Durban cinema where cups of tea were brought round continually and men slept stertorously all over the place.

On the way back to the station in the evening I passed the open swing doors of a bar. Four white men sat on stools, wide-brimmed hats on the backs of their heads, glasses in their hands, and in the large mirror beyond the bar I could see the reflection of their set and gloomy faces. They did not speak. Outside on the pavement four Africans played their mysterious game with stones; they were ragged and thin and laughed with the flash of white teeth, laughed and shouted happily at each other. Inside the well-lit bar their four white brethren sat in graveyard silence, sipping their drinks, never saying a word. I found the contrast in some strange way painful.

The front half of the train left on time, the rear end, owing to the collapse of some vital connecting link, did not move. A smart woman made a scene, understandably as most of her pigskin luggage had been stolen from the compartment while she was seeing a friend in another carriage. Two policemen appeared, to take copious notes, a crowd gathered to give advice and in the resultant hurly-burly the railway officials were able to repair the regrettable lapse of efficiency almost unnoticed.

Afrikaner and I parted company at Bulawayo; he was put in with three elderly Americans and as I passed along the train I caught my last glimpse of him, huddled on a top bunk, looking absolutely petrified. I hope he enjoyed his trip to the Falls; fourteen hundred miles in the train, one day's holiday and then fourteen hundred miles back again. No lack of initiative there.

When I saw them, I had realised how right he was; it was worth the expense and fatigue of the longest journey to get even a single glimpse of that fabulous sight.

Sometime during the dark hours before dawn the school-teacher from Pietermaritzburg woke me to suggest I saw the Falls.

"The train stops for half an hour and you can pick up a car at the hotel, drive out, spend twenty minutes or so having a dekko, then catch us up at Livingstone." I tried to sound enthusiastic and pleased to have been woken.

"Go on, man, it's the chance of a lifetime."

The civil engineer in the third bunk moved uneasily in his sleep. Before the train had stopped at Victoria Falls I was out and running for the hotel followed by cries of encouragement.

"See you in Livingstone—maybe."

"Run, man, run!" A tall black man in a long white overall held open the door of a large American car into which I bounded.

"The Falls!" I gasped dramatically.

"Surely, sah. At once we are there." We drove at top speed till we reached an enormous baobab tree where we got out and I took the happy snap that was expected of me. It had no charm, that cream-of-tartar tree; very few baobabs have. They have an obscene look, a sort of upside-down-roots-at-the-top look. This one was scored with the untidy initials of all the tourists in the whole world.

"Well, sah, it is a fine tree and no mistake." My guide

wore a snap-brim fedora and his shoes were fastened by a brilliant array of buckles!

"Look, sah." A notice told us that the animals were dangerous. Just beyond it an elderly baboon sat scratching himself.

"Come now, no time to lose, to be sure."

We hurried to Livingstone's memorial, a sturdy piece of sculpture looking between palms across the broad flood of the Zambesi. Little islands were dotted like huge stepping-stones to the far bank, green and bushy; not far to the right the river plunged some three hundred feet over the Devil's Cataract and already the water was breaking into white confusion. Beyond, the spray was high in writhing, swirling veils of mist. The roar of the falls was muffled still and I could hear the great sound of the river itself. The guide consulted his expensive watch.

"We go on, sah." We trotted along the path towards the terrifying spot where the river went over the edge.

"There. Is that not truly interesting?" He had to shout.

It was only possible to see the gleaming tumbled curve of the water vanishing towards the depths, for the face of the falls was shrouded in a boiling curtain of spray: 'Mosi-oa-tunya', the 'Smoke that Thunders'. Lord Curzon described the Falls as 'the greatest river wonder in the world', but that was perilously close to an understatement. It is more than a wonder; seventy-five million gallons of water every minute falling three hundred feet; a spectacle on that scale takes a lot of describing.

I crept on hands and knees to the very edge of the bank and pointed my camera downwards at the cauldron, the guide hanging on to my ankles, thinking of his fare. Vaguely through the mist I could make out the shapes of massive buttress rocks clinging to the lip of the chasm with little bushy trees growing from them.

"Oh, careful, sah, do not be slipping." I wriggled back to join him.

"The train," he said dolefully.

"Never mind the train."

"But we have better places to study. Come, follow me."

The road went along the edge of the rain forest where it is never dry. If you have the time and the inclination, you can wrap up in oilskins and enter the forest and walk under the steady roar of drenching spray, under trees that drip for ever.

The surface of the road across the bridge was wet and shining; below was the Boiling Pot, the maelstrom where the water is compressed into the first of the serpentine gorges. We stopped for a moment above the Silent Pool and looked down at the power station and the black, slowly-swirling sheen of what had become a sluggish river.

"Very much floods here." I had read about them in the papers: 'The Swollen Zambesi Still Rising', or something like that; the usual sort of headline that means nothing unless you have been to the place described.

Our last stop was by the little museum and the war memorial. I found a path leading to the edge of the Falls (for those that wallow in facts and figures: exactly one thousand, eight hundred and sixty yards from the Devil's Cataract, at the opposite end of the chasm) and followed it, walking on ground which trembled, through a fine drifting cloud of moisture. The guide was saying something but I could not hear the words above the monstrous thunder of the torrent; I clung to a small tree overhanging three hundred feet of nothing, and wielded my camera feverishly, soaked and exhilarated. A fly hovering above a boiling saucepan of water would probably feel the same. Like Vesuvius, the scale was almost too colossal.

When the film was finished we went back along the trembling track, the guide stalking ahead with his long white coat flapping, for all the world like a surgeon late for an operation. Natives were busy laying out an array of carved animals near the memorial and in the way of

vultures sensing meat they closed in as I passed. One model, a fat little hippo, was tempting; I began to dally.

"No time, sah. Not a moment to be missed." He hustled me into the car. The battery sounded half dead. For quite a while we sat in that useless hulk of metal. I did not mind the train—there would be others—but was worried about my luggage whirling to Lusaka with the teacher and the engineer.

"Do not disarrange yourself, sah. This car goes at fancy speeds. We catch the train anywhere beyond Livingstone, you see."

"I haven't money for a long journey. Only to Livingstone." Miraculously the engine revived and with a convulsive leap we sprang forward. My eyes being tight shut, I saw little of the Great North Road, just a notice-board by the river—something about 'Bathing . . . crocodiles . . . suicidal.' The guide kept up a steady flow of chat, sounding by his voice as though he was facing the back seat. If that was so, then he was driving through the back of his head.

"One little white boy went photographing elephant on a big island. By himself getting very close you see, then one damn elephant smell him and—squash!" I tut-tutted.

"Very sad," I muttered, leaning against the awful pull of centrifugal force. A good deal more about hippos upsetting canoes and 'many people drowned, sah.' It sounded a real picnic spot.

With a spectacular waggle of the rear end the car shot into the station at Livingstone, scattering children and dogs. We need not have rushed; the train sat under the acacias, an oven in the mounting sun, for another hour.

"Well, was it worth it?" asked the schoolteacher. I collapsed on the seat nodding vigorously.

"It's quite a sight," he said.

And that it is.

The compartment was uncomfortably hot and soon we gave up the attempt to read or doze or chat and went to the dining car to drink ice-cold beer. The glare from the landscape was wicked; the landscape itself uniform and monotonous for miles on end; dusty bush growing from dusty soil, pale green and pale khaki and continual blackened smouldering patches where sparks from the engines had set alight the tinder grass. Groups of huts stood close together in clearings and if the train was travelling slowly, which it usually was, hordes of raggy children came scampering, shouting for sweets and bread.

The stations were no more than a whitewashed building and a few scattered huts and a crowd of Africans seething forward to board the packed fourth-class coaches, loaded with bundles and baskets and invariably cheerful. One or two white men, old mahogany from the sun. Only one topee.

At first I sat with my eyes glued to the window not wanting to miss a thing, hoping to see a lion or a buffalo or some graceful antelope leaping about beneath the molten sun, etc., but the only animals were the hump-shouldered cattle watched over by small boys.

No spears sang through the baking air; no warriors tore through the bush wielding knobkerries; many of the natives wore very smart suitings. I felt cheated and turned back to the beer. We drank a lot of beer and then we had lunch, the teacher insisting on buying us a bottle of wine. I got out at one stop to take photographs, feeling very friendly; I took six pictures of a party of enormous black men selling one another skinny hens in baskets.

In the compartment after lunch we found a stranger—a queer beachcomber figure asleep on the seat, dressed in a crumpled papery suit, sandals, one sock. He opened a bleary red eye, rubbed a dirty hand across an unshaven chin and observed in a curiously thick voice: "Man, but I feel lousy."

The three of us sat in a row on the other seat; we listened

to his curiously thick snores; off and on we slept through the hot afternoon, lolling against each other intimately.

"Lock your cases when you go out," advised the engineer.

"I'll bet he hasn't got a ticket," said the teacher.

The teacher told us for the fifth time about the new job he was going to in Broken Hill. We made no attempt to listen, just sitting hot and scratchy and loathing the beachcomber lying so comfortable on our seat.

I watched my first genuine African sunset, seeing the bush darkening, growing black and faintly sinister. For me it was a moment pregnant with mystery and romance; for the engineer it was the moment for hitting the bar. We tidied ourselves and wondered whether to wake Beachcomber.

"Leave him," said the teacher, "he'll only hitch on to us and expect us to buy him drinks." A distant hill stood out against the flaring splendour of the dying sun; a fresh shower of smuts swept over us as the engine tackled a slight incline.

The lights went on and, to see the last garish streaks of the sunset, I had to press my nose to the glass.

Beachcomber woke properly, yawning and hawking and licking his crusted lips. We made for the bar—an opulent little den filled with perfectly silent people sipping drinks. Behind the bar the bottles and glasses kept up a perpetual gentle rattling and a most superior man poured us large gins.

"Ye gods," exclaimed the engineer, staring at the door. A man stood shaved and pomaded, resplendent in a white tropical jacket, fawn trousers, co-respondent shoes and a brilliant silken tie, tapping a gleaming cigarette case nonchalantly and surveying the scene with the bored, yet tolerant glance of a nonesuch.

"Patrick, you wild Irishman! Come and join us." A fair girl waved to him. *En passant* he threw us a contemptuous look. Lock your cases, would you? And what would I be after finding in *your* cases? He was a devil with the

women, it seemed, and had them in stitches with every other remark.

With our dinner we had another bottle of wine and felt we had known each other all our lives; we exchanged addresses and invitations to visit each other—'No, really, I mean it.'

The train stopped again. This time there were more lights and buildings than usual, 'he sound of shunting trucks.

"Mazabuka," said the engineer. "Soon be across the Kafue and then there you are, Lusaka. Lucky devil, we've got another night of this."

A black, contorted face grimaced at us through the window. I clutched my fishknife, thinking of white men being swept into the sea, but he was only trying to sell something.

The wheels clattered on the Kafue bridge as we ate our ice cream and the moon shone coldly on the broad lazy river and you could see the shadow of the train rippling across the milky water. There was time for coffee and then we were drawn into Lusaka.

"Good luck!" shouted the teacher.

"Don't forget, if you're ever up Kitwe way, look me up," called the engineer. I waved, then, picking up my suitcase, I made for the entrance.

In military parlance, the approach march was over, ten thousand miles by sea and rail, and now here I was at the start-line with all Africa the objective.

[3]

LUSAKA is the capital of Northern Rhodesia; it is the seat of government and in that capacity possesses some fine modern buildings; many blocks of offices for the production of more forms; grand neon-lit garages, glass-fronted stores to attract the hungry gaze of the thronging Africans.

It also boasts an hotel which must surely be among the most opulent in the world. The main street, Cairo Road, is nothing to make you reach for your camera; it is only when you come to drive along the Ridgeway—a sort of tropic Sunningdale littered with rich and attractive bungalows, gay with hibiscus, frangipani, jacaranda—that you realise how much wealth must dribble south from the Copper Belt and find its way to Lusaka.

Luxurious cars squat outside on the gravel drives; colourful deck chairs sit on lawns of splendid neatness and greenness where water sprays from revolving hoses to keep everything fresh and English. Sunburnt children play with well-fed dogs under the watchful eyes of stout *ayahs*, and figures in spotless white shorts run energetically over hard tennis courts. These are the cool and comfortable homes of Civil Servants, judges, doctors, lawyers, Government lackeys.

I did not stay in the town but on a farm some miles outside, in a pleasant white bungalow, luxuriously creepered, and roofed with tiles of emerald green. Parquet floors shone in a high state of polish, and large airy windows stood wire-netted against the insects of the night. From the drawing-room one looked out over a most lovely garden, over the close bush to distant Lusaka.

"The place is practically a suburb of the town," said my host. "When we first came out in 1923 there were lions here, now you're lucky if you see one of the smaller buck." 'Suburb' did not seem quite the word to describe a few moth-eaten grass huts and the tall brick tobacco-sheds poking out of the bush. Still, I suppose, compared to hyenas in the living-room . . .

In the garden I could take my choice whether I sat beneath a jacaranda, a flamboyant tree or an acacia. Butterflies weaved among the bamboo, flickered down among the canna lilies and blood-red roses; and little whirring sunbirds with red wings beating almost invisible like the blades of a turning fan. Small, conical ant-hills

thrusting from the lawn, and trails of big black Matabele ants winding from somewhere to somewhere—if you leant close you could hear the terrifying rustle of their hurrying, purposeful passage along their beaten paths. Ants move with a horrifying air of purpose.

Bougainvillæa, poinsettia bushes, crimson, white and golden-yellow; fat white clouds grouped artistically across an azure sky, and the shadows in the garden sharp and black. The air was fragrant. It was exceedingly beautiful.

Beyond the neat boundaries of the farm stretched the bush. On every side, thick and scrubby and dusty and laced with little paths running between the clusters of huts where the natives lived their lives in remarkable contrast.

I used to walk many miles in the bush, taking off my shirt and revelling in unlimited sun; watching the birds along the edges of the small brown river, identifying weavers, widow-birds, orioles, mouse-birds with vivid blushing cheeks, kingfishers and doves and shrikes; bee-eaters and parrots and gorgeous paradise birds. I wandered for hours and never saw a human being, sometimes hearing the sounds of laughter and chatter from some hidden village, smelling the scent of wood smoke. Usually it was quiet except for the harsh dry rustle of a snake or lizard, the sudden whirr of a grasshopper, the muted thud as a wild fig fell.

The hard red tracks were covered in dry crinkled leaves and off the paths the grass was crackly and parched. Tall ant-hills topped with a fringe of gnarled bushes; little secluded graveyards adorned with old pots and pans and rusty basins; everywhere giant cobwebs strong as nylon thread and great bulbous spiders, black and yellow, the same savage colours as a wasp. Hollow logs hung from the trees for the wild bees to fill with honey, and often the murmur of a swarm was loud and soothing in the hot silence.

I enjoyed those first strolls in the African bush. I saw a

great deal. I also learnt how pitifully simple it is to get completely and utterly lost within a mile of home. There are no landmarks, not to the inexperienced, and I wandered angrily to and fro in maddening circles. I climbed the ant-hills but could only see the rolling surface of the bush and not even a tobacco shed. I sought help from the sun and set out full of confidence. Within half an hour I was back where I started. The afternoon was fading slowly into sunset. I remembered you should always spend the night in a tree. Why worry? There were plenty of trees. But why worry anyway? This was suburbia after all.

I was saved by a train, puffing and snorting through the cutting beyond the river, and giving me a clue. The engineer had said how easy it was to get lost in the bush and I had not really believed him; a bit of common sense, I had thought in a silly superior way.

On the way back I picked up a stick in case of snakes and it crumbled to sawdust in my hand. *Hors d'œuvres* for the white ants, the scourge of a continent which go through wood like steel drills, and leave a fat carcass a bleached white skeleton in no time at all.

That night after we were all tucked up in our comfortable beds I was woken by what can only be described as a shindy. People were shouting, doors were opening and shutting, feet thudded and pattered, I lay wondering if it was anything to do with me, wondering if I should reach for my small automatic and be ready to fight off an intrusion of wild-eyed Rhodesian Mau-Mau. I heard the voice of my host.

"They're in the bed! Good God, they're everywhere!"

"Go and start the engine, then we'll see what we're doing."

I got up, lit my candle and went to join the fun. The ants which were always moving close to the house had decided to attack. From all sides they had attacked, advancing from the garden in their millions.

"Look at our room," wailed my hostess. "Just look

at the walls." You could hardly see the walls for the mass of red ants seething in the candlelight; they were pouring across the parquet in relentless processions. The engine coughed into life and the light went on.

"They haven't done this for months. I *am* sorry." I assured her there were none in my room. Her husband joined us, jumping and slapping at his legs and thighs, cursing softly. I felt a sharp nip on my ankle. The leading scouts had reached me. Now it was only a question of time.

"The other night it was a blasted mouse in my bed, now it's this." He slapped furiously. We went into action. We trickled paraffin all round the house and set light to it; we put down strips of fatty bacon and some old meat bones on the veranda to attract their attention; we inserted the bed legs into saucers of water and shook out the bedding; we jumped and slapped and swore and tried to keep the ants from spreading to the rest of the house, stuffing paper under the doors and into the keyholes. We jumped more and more frequently, higher and higher, and our language grew ever more basic. Still they came, like the hordes of the East, appearing from out of the night, hustling, bustling, bent on entry, passing ruthlessly over the charred corpses of thousands, polishing off the bacon in a trice. We had baths and managed to drown a hundred or so.

All this took time and dawn was threatening before we were able to regain our uneasy beds. I personally slept fitfully, waking very often to feel the beastly little nip-nip-nip of those revolting little savages. By breakfast time there wasn't an ant to be seen save the litter of dead. As quickly as they had appeared so they had, for some mysterious reason and on some mysterious signal, vanished back to their lairs. The houseboy found the whole episode vastly amusing, sweeping away the casualties with unnecessary grins all over his face.

"Last night wasn't too bad. We've been driven out of the house before now."

The next night, to keep up the tempo, the inhabitants

of the nearest grass huts brewed their weekly quota of beer. Or rather they drank what had been brewed some days before. We were tired after the previous night and took to our beds early.

"They're brewing a lot of illegal stuff. It's about time we organised a police raid and shook them up a bit. If this goes on we'll have the whole place absolutely out of hand." Some at home will say, throwing up their hands in horror: 'How inhuman, how reactionary, how too Fascist-beast, depriving the poor African of his one simple pleasure, his one escape from the cruel world of the white boss! And now they are going to send their police among these innocent people, God's dusky children, to kick over their poor pots of beer, laying about them with cudgels and *zamboks*. Oh, fie!'

Something tells me that those people have not lain awake for most of a night listening to the primeval monotony of the drums, the crazed and bestial shrieks and cries rising into the darkness; the eerie wailing of the women as they sing, succumbing to the potency of the home-made beer. To be fair, at first the noise was no worse than a regimental dinner or a rowdy gathering of bachelor blades, but towards the small hours it had turned animal and snarling and I would have required a lot of urging to join the festivities. I felt very close to something; I don't quite know what, but something frightening.

Gradually the human element died to sudden outbursts of incoherent jabbering, peals of eldritch laughter; only the drums kept going, beating out their primordial rhythm, on and on and on.

At breakfast the houseboy fell flat on his face carrying the coffee pots; in the garden one of the boys lay unconscious among the sweet scent of the roses, and one drummer at least was still sticking to his task.

"That settles it," said George, wiping coffee off the floor. "We'll get the police in." The raid took place; much beer was found and confiscated; a few fines were imposed, but

I don't suppose anyone minded desperately; they just got down to preparing a slightly stronger brew.

George showed me the farm; we looked at the Jersey cattle, at the sweating pigs and at the funny little Persian sheep; we looked at the comfrey and the oil palms and the Napier fodder; we talked farming, prodded supine bodies, scratched cows and fed pieces of linseed cake to a very fine bull behind tubular steel bars. Then we went to sit in the shade of a flamboyant tree in the middle of the beautiful garden while Margaret potted with pruning scissors, beneath a huge sun hat.

"Do you find it difficult to think of this as Africa?" he gestured towards the rosebeds.

"It was easy enough last night." He laughed.

"You'll need more than European clothes and a hotch-potch of half-understood ideas to wipe out those drums and what they represent." A pair of sunbirds flitted round the bamboo, their scarlet bibs bright as splashes of blood.

"What about Mau-Mau?" I asked. "Could it happen here?"

"In Africa, anything could happen anywhere, at any time. No, not here. At the first suspicion of trouble the Union would send in forces without a 'by your leave' and put it down before it had time to get a hold. They can't afford a thing like Mau-Mau so close to home." Smoke curled above the trees along the railway as a passing train set light to another stretch of grass.

"Not that there aren't plenty of agitators about, stirring up the grievances. And they've got their grievances all right, oh, yes. But they've got to be put right slowly, not in the sudden panic rush advocated by some of our more pea-brained intellectuals at home who have met a few charming talented Africans in stiff collars and think that the rest of Africa's the same."

"But it will come, won't it?"

"Integration? Of course it will. In time. At the moment we have a sort of benevolent *apartheid* which will gradually

slacken, until one day it may perhaps be fair shares for all. But for Heaven's sake don't rush it, or no one will benefit, certainly not the unfortunate Bantu. Go too fast and we'll see the end of everything a great many of us have worked for—for a very long time—and not only for ourselves but them as well." He pointed at the stooping figure of a garden boy.

That was one point of view. I wished I could communicate with the boy weeding the gravel path and find out his ideas.

"Whatever people may tell you, and believe me they'll tell you a lot before you leave Africa, remember that the work, the real sweat-and-blood work out here has been done by the white man. Never forget that. The Bantu have made no effort, beyond a bit of lazy scratching at the soil, to develop their country or themselves. If they want fruit off a tree they're usually too lazy to pick it, they simply tear down the whole branch. Now I've talked for long enough and it's time for a glass of something. Don't mind me, I've got a bee in my bonnet about the future here, that's all. When you've been in Africa for thirty-two years you'll have one too, about something or other. One chap I know can think of nothing but how to train giraffes to steeplechase, says it'll bring in dollars."

In the ship I had told myself: no politics, not one word of politics; enjoy yourself, take photographs, watch birds and animals, meet people, travel—but keep off politics.

I knew it was impossible, a pipe dream. For if you think of Africa you think of her future and the future of her people, both black and white; you cannot help it. However deep you strive to bury your head you cannot stop yourself thinking. Why should you? For without a shadow of doubt it is by far the most pressing and most complex problem of our time.

So if occasionally politics creep in, the skeleton at the merry, nothing-to-do-with-me feast, please forgive me, and as you skip feverishly, remember that the little

matter of black and white could easily become, as it has been before, a matter of life and death.

‘Maybe our children’s children shall see the spearheads fly.

Down in the dim-lit future somewhere behind the veil,
The sheep may turn on the shepherd and—
Prayers for the heathen fail.’

That was written before the Great War.

[4]

I AM not normally a keen devotee of school sports, for the standard is not usually of the highest and often there are long, unexplained pauses between the events, and always an atmosphere of somewhat strained bonhomie and exaggerated heartiness hard to bear. The cold is sometimes intense.

But these were different. Firstly, it was extremely hot; secondly, the competitors were black, and thirdly, the standard was amazingly high. We watched lithe and graceful youths run and jump and hurdle, who with spiked shoes and proper training could well become world-beaters. They ran with bare feet on grass.

George and I sat among the mothers, some black, some white, some *café-au-lait*, resplendent in their smart clothes. It had never struck me before how strangely spectacular lipstick looks against a black skin. Many clergymen moved among the throng in natty tropic suitings, hob-nobbing with their flock, clapping their hands and shouting: “Bravo, indeed!” and “Well done, Sikufweba!” Or Mushabati, Chongo, Mswinga. Unfamiliar names; but no stranger really than Cholmondeley, Goodspeed, Bradshaw or Wittingdon-Worseley.

There was a Boy Scout band that struck up at the slightest provocation and a microphone that crackled

and distorted most of the interesting announcements made by a dumpy man in shirtsleeves. There was a posse of police very smart in their shorts and puttees and huge dusty boots; there was a vast contingent of children lining the track and cheering on their chosen heroes. In the centre of the field stood a blackboard keeping us *au fait* with the points scored by the three competing schools. Men rushed hither and thither wielding megaphones through which they barked staccato orders and instructions. They mopped a lot.

The sun beat upon the canvas awning close above our heads drawing a powerful yet, thank goodness, indefinable smell from the assembled multitude.

Six runners pounded round and round, bent on completing three miles in the shortest possible time. One, a stoutish lad in skin-tight shorts, fell back at every yard, but he courageously persevered, his face greying, arms flailing, and the children laughed and jeered to see such sport. With any luck, they told each other, he may die. Truly that would be something. He did not die, he was merely extremely sick just below the V.I.P. enclosure; the children loved that.

The winner broke every sort of Rhodesian record but we never heard his time as the band, bored with standing idle in the sun, blared into 'Annie Laurie'; at least some of them did; the rest were busy with 'Life on the Ocean Wave'. We joined the queue for tea; a pity, for we missed seeing a black man in a whitewashed bowler being escorted from the ground after committing some small breach of the peace. Instead we ate a delicious tea served by dedicated women, hot and harassed, shaking the damp hair out of their eyes.

After tea there was a tug-of-war which sent the children mad with excitement; the best part being the coaches. The winning coach appeared to be having a fit during the final, for the foam was thick on his mobile face.

Then came prize-giving and a succession of inaudible speeches delivered into a microphone that had long since

given up the struggle; bursts of ragged clapping greeted the prizewinners as they stepped smartly forward to receive their medallions. A group of pupils in striped blazers stood near us and their comments were both loud and in excellent English. They were clearly not members of the winning school and they clearly thought there had been dirty work somewhere round the blackboard. A clergyman spoke sharply to them about sportsmanship.

"Three cheers for Mr——" The name was drowned by the tuning up of cymbals.

"Hip-hip-HURRAH!" It was very British. A Union Jack flapped in the hot breeze. How well it looks against tropical skies!

". . . team spirit . . . examples to all . . . this modern age . . . sport is essential . . . play hard . . ." The chief V.I.P. bellowed into the useless microphone and his words came whispering out. In every direction policemen seemed to be chasing small nippy *totos* (children). Suddenly the technician who had been fiddling with the wires achieved success and the closing words of the speech boomed out, damaging the eardrums of those huddled close to the loudspeakers. For a few minutes they wandered about holding their ears and looking quite dazed.

Then the teams formed up behind the band and marched off the field to the strains of 'Lilliburlero', followed by an avalanche of supporters.

"That's that," said George. "I hope you weren't too bored."

"Bored? How could anyone be bored by an afternoon like that?" I hope he realised I really meant it.

I was introduced to a number of people and I told them all how much I had enjoyed the sports.

"I don't imagine you expected quite that standard," said one.

"Ah, but Africa's full of surprises," put in an arch little woman.

"You ought to have been here last year. Four Empire

records were equalled and one boy came within a half-second of a world record."

"It's time we were off, we're going out to dinner," said George.

The teams were still marching round the field behind the band, which obviously could not find a way out through the crowd. Some of them looked very tired.

After dinner we drove back along the Ridgeway. Cars were turning into Government House between tarbooshed sentries. I caught a quick glimpse of evening-clothes bolt upright within the cars and a distant view of Government House floodlit at the end of a long drive. Such grandeur was not for us; we went on our plebeian way enjoying our simple pleasures.

The numbers in the party were fluid; at dinner we had been seven; outside the cinema we had increased to ten and once inside we occupied a whole row.

Lana Turner did a luscious impersonation of the Merry Widow. An oldish film by the procession of what appeared to be white ants moving vertically across the screen and by the uncertainty of the soundtrack which often made the actors say words their lips had patently never formed. That made it more fun and we all laughed immoderately, to the extreme irritation of a blimpish couple immediately to our rear (e.g., "What makes you think I care what happens to you?" asked Miss Turner, showing lots of delightful bosom, feinting with her eyes. "There is only *one* Vienna," exclaims her leading man, skipping a couple of reels. Not very funny but we roared).

Half-way through, the lights came on and we were treated to music and banana-flavoured ice-cream. I surveyed the blimpish pair. They sat glowering, silently hating; the man chewed his moustache, the woman chewed hers. Even one seemed to know everyone else; there was a good deal of waving and friendly greeting.

"Not so very long ago," said the woman next to me, "we used to put on full evening-dress for a film, and during the interval we strolled up and down a mud road in our finery. That was keeping up appearances and the natives loved it. Silly really, when you come to think of it, especially as we only had benches to sit on and the film always broke down long before the end.

The audience was all-white. I wondered what the unhappy-looking Africans hanging about by the entrance would have made of La Turner and the flickering silver screen. Probably no more than we did.

When we came out, the street was empty; a broad street along which you expected to see approaching from opposite ends two lonely figures in cowhats and spurred boots, their hands hovering near their guns. A broad dusty street flanked by white low buildings; at intervals, jacarandas hung the fine tracery of their leaves across the sparkling sky. And yet if I shut my eyes and listened to the happy chatter round me I might just as well be coming out of a cinema in Carlisle or Ipswich or Chelsea. I must get away, I told myself; away from towns and lights and dinner parties; out into the great mysterious wastes which are Africa; to sleep beneath the stars and hear around me, not people discussing a film and whether it was time to go home, but the myriad sounds of the bush at night. I think the banana ice must have gone to my head.

The party broke up.

"See you on Thursday," they said.

"Yes, by jove, best bib and tucker for Thursday."

"Good night, Marjorie."

"Good night, Peter." Good night, Paul. Good night, all. Good *night*.

At home we shed our ties, put our feet up and talked. George told me stories of the early days.

"When we first came out I got a job on the building of the Mulungushi Dam—I'll try and take you to see it one day, it's a pretty remarkable effort. We had to build our

own houses, too. A few poles and some bundles of grass and mud to fill in the gaps, a thorn fence round the lot. Most of our furniture we knocked together out of old packing cases and things, you know, hang some bits of cretonne on it and there's a dressing-table. A rough and ready answer, but then it was a rough and ready sort of life. If you heard a noise near the hut at night it wasn't a cat after the fishbones but usually a lion sniffing about or a hyena on the make."

Laughter floated through the open window from the compound, and then the screech of some night bird; the insidious scent of the frangipani. On the walls Peter Scott pictures reminded of the cold wild winds of bleak and desolate places; perfectly matched roses lined the rim of an alabaster bowl, and on the piano stood a photograph of an attractive girl standing by a car with a mountain towering behind.

"On the whole the animals of Africa are a fairly decent crowd if you leave them alone, except perhaps the old rhino. He's a bad-tempered character, all two tons of him and he can nip along like a cruiser tank gone berserk. He and the buffalo, they're the ones to watch. Don't ever try to prove how brave you are with either of them; it's not worth it."

I asked about the legend of the elephants and their secret dying ground.

"They always say that elephants make for Lake Victoria to die. They go into the water, struggle for a while and then sink. Perhaps they know about the quicksands and know they can die and be buried all at the same time. Elephants know a great many things, that's quite certain." He murmured two lines of a poem.

"Hidden away from the haunts of men,
west of a widespread lake . . .
Is the sombre place where the
vanishing race of elephants
come to die!" . . .

“Talking about elephants, explain this if you can. There was a well-known ivory-hunter who’d shot dozens of elephants. Well, one day one of them got him, killed him. He was buried, and the same night elephants came from God knows where and trampled all over him. Got into the cemetery, found where he was buried and made a nonsense of his grave. That’s a true story, I know it for a fact.”

Next day he took me to see the land he was selling in twenty-acre plots to people who wanted to farm in a small way or to market-garden, or merely to live in peace away from concrete and stainless steel and the stench of petrol fumes.

We drove along narrow, rutted roads between thick bush, slowing to catch a glimpse of the framework of the houses half erected in clearings, the tin shanties and the mud huts where the families, white families, lived till their new homes were completed.

“Most of them are doing it all themselves.” Many had laid out the gardens and cleared their small fields before starting on their houses. Those we saw looked very happy, very tanned and very industrious. Two small children in khaki shorts staggered along with bricks; the father stood at the top of a rickety ladder waving a mason’s trowel; the mother scattered corn for a mob of chickens; and an Alsatian ran holding a stick in its smiling jaws. A group of Africans made bricks and mixed cement in the shade of banana trees.

“They’ll still be hard at it eight hours from now.”

“What will the Unions say? The Brick Workers’, the Cement Mixers’ and the Mason Trowellers’, won’t they be sending sharp-nosed snoopers to see that the house isn’t built too quickly, or too efficiently?”

“Not here. At least not yet. But they’ll soon be with us, don’t you worry. We’ll need all the Civil Service and all the Departments and all the paperwork we can scrape together to provide work for all the Bantu we are so busy

educating. They can work away spinning webs of red tape and nonsense and tying themselves up so damned tight that all they'll be praying for is to go back to loin-cloths and assegais and their own simple uncomplicated sort of life."

We had lunch with a man whose hobby was medals. He kept a room specially for his collection which numbered four thousand; he apparently knew them all by name and they ranged from the Victoria Cross to outlandish and splendid affairs from Zanzibar and Kashmir and Inner Mongolia. He was in touch with other medallists, he told us with quiet pride, all over the world, civilised and the other. He showed us a letter received that day from a collector in, by the look of the writing, Outer Space. To it was pinned a rainbow ribbon.

"Can you read this?" I inquired gently.

"Good Lord, no, it's in Javanese. But I know the ribbon."

"Oh!"

After lunch we were shown his albums. They were fascinating but by the end of it my eyes were crossed and glazed from the close study of so much colour.

"I suppose you have them all by now," I tried cautiously. He looked at me, astonished at such ignorance.

"What you have seen here represents about half of the world's ribbons."

"Oh!" I mean, what else can you say?

"You might not think it," said George as we drove away, "but he's an extremely efficient farmer on top of that lot."

"Oh!" That was my moronic contribution to the conversation throughout most of the afternoon.

The phrase 'sundowner' had always conjured a certain setting in my mind—a flag standing out stiffly from a tall white staff set in a square of green lawn, and on a wooden

veranda square-cut men smoking Barney's who rise to their feet as the sun sinks into desert, bush or jungle; the flag coming slowly down and somewhere offstage a bugle sounding.

The reality was very different. A lot of people milling round a table of drinks on the veranda; insects milling round the lanterns and beyond the area of light the darkness soft and brilliant with the sparkle of myriad stars. Headlights speared the night as more and more guests arrived to swell the happy throng. How much more pleasant it was than a similar affair indoors, stiff with noise and smoke and no room to move! Here the smoke rose with the noise and vanished into the dark branches of the trees.

The party began at sundown and ended somewhere towards dawn. Some of it was spent in cars driving to someone else's house, through endless bush over indifferent roads at fairly high speed. As is the way of such parties, an amazing variety of people swam across one's vision, into one's life for one brief hazy moment and then away for ever. Many of them wanted to know what I thought of Africa, many told me not to believe a word anyone else told me. One man, fat and breathless, accused me of being one of those damned fellows who come out from U.K. for a week or two and then go home and write a lot of claptrap about conditions in the Federation. Then he asked me to come and stay on his farm and shoot guinea-fowl.

The fellow with the medals was there, pleased as Punch at having obtained some rare ribbons from the Fiji Islands; a woman with the brightest of golden hair drove me into a corner and talked thinly-veiled sex in a most amusing and attractive way. More and more cars arrived and soon the noise was considerable. I wondered how the inhabitants of the compound, deprived of their beer, were enjoying the civilised festivities.

"Tear yourself away," said George, "we've been asked

out to Jimmy's place." I left the golden woman, found myself in a car with six people I had never seen before, bucketing through the darkness. Owls and other night-birds kept swinging away from the headlight beams, quickly blotted out by the dust from the car ahead.

Jimmy's house was long and low and white, thatched with old grass; the living-room was low and black-beamed, a huge fire blazed in a great brick fireplace, and oil lamps lit our moist and grinning faces. Little lizards ran along the beams deafened by the noise. A pretty girl appeared, apparently to carry on where the golden woman had left off, but unfortunately we were joined by a rugged little chap with a face the colour of badly burnt toffee, a spiky moustache and an eyeglass.

"This is my husband," said the girl bleakly. A stage figure, speaking in clipped and military fashion.

"When were you in the Indian Army?" he barked.

"I'm afraid I wasn't."

"Nonsense!" I did not argue for I thought he might go away. "I know an Indian Army man when I see one." He was quite truculent.

"Hey, Subahdar!" called a friend. He vanished, but not for long, returning to break up our enjoyable conversation with: "God, but we had some grand times at Simla!"

He stood about, getting in the way. There were spiders on the white walls; at least I think there were, and a mass of tiny dogs sniffing at our ankles. The girl got absorbed into a group of men. Her husband tried to get me to admit I had been in the Indian Army. Somehow I found myself listening to an improbable man in an Air Force tie who told how he had been a colonel in the Commandos. Later in the evening I heard him say how bitterly cold it had been on the bridge of his corvette. The spiders had multiplied in a terrifying way and the tiny dogs went on sniffing.

"You could call me a detribalised Scot," a man in a

tartan waistcoat kept repeating, again and again. The burnt-toffee man was going round kissing all the women, tripping over the tiny dogs. Then a man whom I had thought to be dead in a chair suddenly sprang to life and began proposing toasts in a most reckless fashion.

"I know I'm no good at speechifying, but I feel that on this—well, dammit, you all know what I mean. As it's Jimmy's birthday we ought to drink a drink to show . . . to show . . ." He faltered.

"Good show!" shouted an immensely tall man. Laughter, raising of glasses, frenzied sniffing from the dogs.

"What about a song, Subahdar?"

"You could call me a detribalised Scot."

Subahdar stood on a chair to conduct us in a fine rendering of Happy Birthday . . . Happy Birthday, *dear* Jimmy . . .; I noticed one of the smallest dogs eating its way through a tray of delicacies. The heat in the room was terrific. For a spell I was hemmed in by a man who told a fund of *sotto voce* stories—"this is a damned good one, you'll like this. Well, there was a fellow who lived in Stoke Poges . . ."

The detribalised Scot joined us. "They tell me you're from old Caledonia." I nodded. We shook hands.

"I've been out here for thirty years but I've never forgotten my old home in Peebles. That's what I say about us Scots, we're scattered all over the globe but we never forget we're Scotsmen born and bred. You could call us detribalised Scots."

" . . . and the wife turned over in bed and said, now's your chance . . ."

"Where are you from?" I told him.

"Ah, Aberdeen. The Granite City with the Heart of Gold." I felt rather sick.

" . . . and the young man got up and finished off the pigeon pie. A damned good one, don't you think?"

The little dog, bloated now, was looking round for more.

"Then there's the one about . . ."

"I've been out here for thirty years and I don't know the answer." To what? I wonder. I never found out, for we took to the cars again and drove even faster over even worse roads to another long, low, white house. A sort of country club with a small floor and a gleaming bar presided over by a loud young man in shorts with a sheath knife at his belt and the most enormous hands.

A different mass of dogs sniffed, but this time they were large ridgebacks and their noses wandered hastily over our waists.

Music came from a radiogram; coloured bulbs lit the scene uncertainly and made dancing a pleasurable pain.

I played poker dice with the barman and a woman with a young-old face somehow falling to pieces. I lost a lot of threepenny pieces.

"If you're still thinking of catching that plane, we ought to be off," advised George. "It goes in about two hours."

"Why not come out here to live?" suggested Old Caledonia. "Dorothy's got a piece of land that would suit you a treat." It was interesting, just for a moment, to speculate on Dorothy and who she could be.

"Oh, you simply must come back," urged a girl I had never set eyes on. I wished I had.

"We Scots ought to stick together." Think of us, glued together in bundles of ten. I sought out Jimmy to thank him.

"Delighted, old boy. Pity you couldn't have made the party at my place. Still, we'll be seeing more of you now you've got a job in Lusaka." I wonder who he thought I was?

George took me to the airport; we drove in that particular silence induced by the gradual waning of alcoholic enthusiasm. On my ticket it stated the importance of being at the airport an hour before the aeroplane took off.

"Just how dead can a place look?" grumbled George. Not a soul stirred; it was the black hour close to dawn, and

it was cold. I still felt rather tight. A massive Constellation stood on the runway, cardboard against the slowly paling sky. We continued to hang about not saying much, while a gusty little wind blew pieces of paper about and swirled the dust in our faces. After a while some officials arrived yawning and then at least we could go inside. I longed to show my tickets to someone, to find someone else to take my case, in fact for someone to take some sort of interest.

"This way, please," said a pert girl with a pony tail. The case was weighed and naturally was a pound or so overweight.

"When does the plane leave for Ndola?" George sounded on the fringe of bad temper.

"It hasn't come in yet."

"Isn't that it on the runway?" I asked. She glanced through the window.

"You won't get far in that," she said. "That's the plane for U.K. Yours will be a Dak." I had only flown once in my life and that also had been in a Dakota, an ambulance plane. For a variety of reasons the flight had not been a happy one.

"They fly at a bumpy height," said George. That's just what was needed, a bumpy flight. Dawn burst upon us in crimson, brassy glory, hurting my eyes and reflecting from the shining hull of the Constellation in brilliant splinters of light. Africa rarely disappoints with the getting up and the going down of her sun.

A team of mechanics in blue overalls appeared to service the giant, filling her with petrol and oil, putting air into the huge tyres, swarming all over the proud monster. It was by now half an hour after the scheduled time of departure. The first suspicions of a headache were pressing and throbbing. The Dakota came in from the south, landed and taxied to rest beside the monster looking awfully small; a sparrow beside an eagle.

Everyone moved in the leisurely way befitting a Sunday morning. I was glad to notice men squirting petrol into the

Dakota and wiping some of the surplus oil off the wings. They loaded the Sunday papers into every seat but one. I was the only passenger. The air-hostess took my ticket and ushered me aboard. I peered through the tiny window and waved to the huddled figure of George on the bench, but I think he had fallen asleep.

The door was slammed, the engines roared, the whole contraption shook and shuddered. Fasten your seat belts, instructed the sign, and no smoking. We began to move and I lost sight of George. For the next few minutes my eyes were firmly shut as we bounced gradually into the air, Man's third element. I sucked convulsively at my barley sugar. It was better than the last flight, at least there were no shells bursting near the airfield. We climbed and circled like some clumsy, overfed bird, and the flaming sunrise turned the oil on the wing to streaks of rusty blood. I tried to put away such similes and accepted with joy the offer of coffee.

Mostly during the one-hour flight I dozed; sometimes I looked down upon the flattened countryside and saw the miles and miles of bush, dark green and dingy yellow; the thin red ribbons of the roads; little lakes, steel rain puddles. I saw hills and, in the distance, violet mountains; I saw a serpent river and the tiny pimples of village huts. The metal of the wing was blinding in the full impact of the sun.

I listened to the smooth sound of the engines, trying not to think of newspaper headlines about aerial disasters, my ears acutely tuned to catch the first sign of a hesitation or splutter. Above mountains we bumped, sideslipping and suddenly dropping like a lift with a broken cable. I asked for more barley sugar, checked the position of the paper bag, and envied the inanimate bundles of Sunday papers. And I told myself repeatedly, as I have done so often during my life, that never again would I touch a drop of drink.

I slept and dreamt of a girl in a tartan waistcoat who kept saying:

"Fasten your seat belt, please. We're coming in to Ndola."

The machine banked steeply and I clenched my sticky palms, biting back animal screams. The tyres squealed on solid ground. I had reached the Copper Belt.

[5]

IN 1902 a certain William Collier was prospecting in Northern Rhodesia, up near the borders of the Congo, for his employers, the Bechuanaland Exploration Company, and he noticed in some of the villages that the inhabitants had in their possession lumps of malachite, and malachite he knew was a carbonate of copper.

He made inquiries but no one would say anything except that these pieces came from the Kalanga. Collier did not believe this, and when he killed a hippopotamus and found a copper bullet buried in its body he knew for certain they were lying.

But they still would not tell him where they were finding the copper. The local Arab trader had persuaded them to keep silent or to answer the white man with lies. Then one day an ancient African came to Collier and suggested they go hunting; the old man was patently too frail and weak for hunting and Collier, suspecting there was more to it, agreed to the suggestion.

After two days they reached the Luanshya stream and there Collier shot a roan antelope. On reaching its body he saw vivid on the earth the green stains of copper. Next day he killed a reedbuck on the other side of the stream and discovered the second limb of the ore vein. And that moment, fifty-six years ago, was the beginning of what is now known as the Copper Belt.

The ore discovered by Collier was of so low a grade that the claim was not registered until 1913 and, in fact,

the Roan Antelope Mine was not opened until the 'twenties. At the start of the operation the mortality rate among the African labour was very high indeed, the workers dying by the score of malaria, blackwater fever, typhoid or pneumonia. They decided there was a snake in the stream flowing through the 'Valley of Death' that brought disease to those who dug up the surrounding land, a fabulous and magical snake encouraged by the local spirits to put a spanner in the works. But the mine had their answer ready in an old-timer named Chirupula Stevenson whom they persuaded to exorcize the snake. Countering magic with even better magic he produced a snake almost from a hat and killed it.

After that in some miraculous way, such is the power of suggestion, the death rate fell to ordinary manageable proportions and from then on the mine began to prosper.

Where Collier had made camp with the old hunter there is now the thriving, expanding town of Luanshya; red-roofed bungalows among the purple jacarandas, the flame trees, the scarlet spathedia and the ubiquitous poinsettia shrubs, house the twelve to fifteen hundred Europeans and South Africans employed in and by the Mine.

A sprawling, active little town with broad roads, overshadowed by the towering chimneys of the Mine belching great billowing gouts of leaden smoke. On the road, the fine wide tarmac road from Ndola, I caught sight of those tall chimneys, gigantic and alien above the trees, pointing into the cloudless sky long before I could see the roofs of the town.

The edifices of man rarely fit pleasantly into natural surroundings, and those chimneys were no exception; their effect was hard and discordant, and yet in that combination of fat lazy smoke and burning azure sky there was a certain incongruous beauty.

I went with Harold and Janet out to the dam where the

country club is situated on the shores of the broad lake. The dam is built from the grey, powdery waste of crushed rock, and the landscape is lunar, the glare wicked, and everywhere the breezes suck the grey dust into little 'Whirling Willies', miniature dust storms twirling like lanky grey tops.

But round the clubhouse the grass is green and flowers bloom, and children in sunhats play and splash in the shallows, while their fathers and mothers sail the boats they have built themselves.

"In a spot like this," said Harold, "we have to make our own amusements; there's nothing laid on at the end of the street. Our entertainment is home-made and not spoon-fed."

A small wind ruffled the surface of the artificial lake and curved the gaily coloured sails of the boats, on the far shore the bush grew thickly green, a vivid strip between the sky and the water. I found it very hot indeed.

"No, the Welfare State hasn't caught up with us yet; there's still plenty of scope for the individual."

A small boat came creaming by, her crimson sail packed tight with wind, two sunburnt boys leaning out over the water.

"A *sprog*, one of our specialities; they go like the proverbial bat leaving Hell, and are very cheap to make."

In a distant corner of the lake squat speedboats buzzed angrily in tight circles. It was a scene of happy and light-hearted activity in the middle of that extraordinary, gritty, white waste.

We drove back between the whitewashed bush seeing everywhere the bleached twisted hills of powdered rock and the monstrous ridges of black slag; smoke, pressed flatter by a rising wind, hung low above us, masking the sun and disagreeably tainted.

Buckets swung along cables, busily hurrying to and fro; trains of little trucks wound across the black and white hills disgorging themselves, trundling back for more;

building up an entirely new land. Whistles blew, sirens sounded, great machinery pounded and thudded without pause; large numbers of Africans pedalled in every direction on smart new bicycles. All was bustle and busyness beneath that lowering smokecloud.

This was the Copper Belt, the richest spot in Central Africa and, like Africa herself, on a mammoth scale. Africa has nothing small about her; if she grows a forest, then it is a very large one; if she pushes up mountains, then they are certainly worthy of the name; her rivers are broad and they flow a very long way; her animals are savage and untamed as she herself. And when she gives, then she does so generously: in gold, in diamonds, in timber and in copper.

Africa is a colossus which has slept throughout the centuries but which is now at last awakening, yawning and stretching, bursting with the energy stored during the long lazy years; rich with untapped, unimagined wealth; possessing the potential to become one day a power every bit as great as America or Russia or China. She could be compared to the slow-thinking, slow-moving heavyweight who suddenly begins to realise the strength and skill latent in his fists. With a brain to guide him he is irresistible; on his own he is no more than a slow, unwieldy punchbag. Harold broke into my thoughts:

“After lunch, I’ll show you the smelting.”

Inside the smelting sheds was a trembling, roaring, utterly deafening hell; Dante would have revelled in the din. Heat and smoke and dusty, bellowing noise; black, glistening faces half hidden by black, glistening goggles and black, glistening bodies encased in sacking and leather, wielding long rods of iron, shovels, rakes; dirty white cloths wrapped round their heads, sweat rags round their necks. White men in shapeless sackcloth and large gauntlet gloves pulled down the wire-meshed goggles to

peer into appalling cauldrons or to direct the tipping of the molten copper, the sealing of the blast-furnaces; arms raised to ward off the unbelievable heat as jets of thin brassy flame stabbed from the hidden fires, to wipe their streaming skins, to adjust nose-clips and the air filters on their mouths.

Harold leant close now and then to yell something into my dazed ears but I only made out one word in three. We went up on to the steel galleries, catwalks threaded between conveyor belts, furnaces, water chutes and the crushers. The rock is brought to the crushers, the ball mills, where it is destroyed by iron cannon balls and high-pressure water and the copper released to float upon the surface of the water as a black and silvery scum.

Then it is skimmed off like some infernal cream and mixed with silica rock, do not ask me why. We walked below the overhead girders where men in little moving cabins looked down to direct the tipping of the vats. As the vats were towed along by the trailing, clattering chains, they swayed and their contents, searing liquid ore, slopped over, falling many feet to the ground in a terrifying display of lethal beauty; fountains of sparks shot in all directions with a tremendous outburst of sizzling and hissing. Great cranes rumbled backwards and forwards high above our poor naked heads, towing monstrous hooks that swung with sufficient force to stave in a battleship. I scurried along keeping close to Harold, dazed and choking and in the grip of a strange dizzy fascination. The noise was flung back redoubled by the tin roof of that huge shed. With a sudden, shattering roar, air was blown into a molten mass of ore.

"Oxidisation!" shouted Harold. I nodded wisely, ducking to avoid a scything curtain of sparks.

In that dark and gloomy hall the only light was that of the bubbling metal; the searing glare of molten waterfalls; an occasional bright blaze of greenish fire vivid through the dust and smoke. Iron clanged against iron, and

the ground shook to the thunder of the ball mills. And everywhere, in every corner, those black and shining men, inhabitants of Hades, stoking and shovelling and leaning back from the savage kiss of naked flame.

We seemed ill-protected against the lurking dangers of that sombre place in our shirts and tropic trousers, our hair filling with ash and iron filings, our mouths and nostrils with grit and stench.

Men were hosing down the metal gangways, directing a constant stream of water on to the hot steel so that we were able to walk in our thin shoes without dancing in discomfort.

"Run!" Not knowing why, I leapt forward at speed, scampering through an avalanche of wet smuts that stained our clothes with long pear-shaped streaks of black.

We were approaching sunlight and found men chipping with heavy hammers at the blistered blocks of copper as they fell from the mouths of chutes on to a slow-moving belt. The lumps were still hot and were covered in a wrinkled skin of purplish meringue. The hammers evened off the edges; trucks stood ready to accommodate the endless supply of blocks spewing from the mills, to carry them down to the ships at Beira.

It was very like Kierunavaara, the Iron Mountain of the Arctic. Steel was biting into rock, every hour of every day, and every night the sky was lurid with flame and in the crimson pall of smoke there hung unwritten the awful sign: 'Men at Work'.

We were still shouting at each other long after we had reached the house and the silence pressed hard against my eardrums.

That evening, in calm and lovely contrast, Harold drove me to a farm on the banks of the Kafue. In fact, the contrast only became calm and lovely on arrival, for we drove in a very small, very fast sports car, and twice the

speedometer needle flickered well above the hundred and our hair was torn practically from our scalps by the slipstream. But Harold was a remarkably good driver, the road was metalled and our progress exhilarating in the extreme.

A delightful man showed me his pigs below grass shelters and his longhorned Afrikaner cattle before we went to sit on a veranda right above the gentle brown flow of the river, facing the sunset beyond tall trees on the opposite bank. The water was split by little islands and currents swirled softly among great rocks, soothing as the sound of water always is. One of his young sons steered his canoe with amazing skill across the flow of the wide river, darting in and out between the rocks.

"He's done that since he was so high," said our host. "They could both handle a canoe almost before they could walk. It's a good life for them really."

We drank our excellent whisky, slapping at the mosquitos as the palms blackened against a sunset of scarlet and gold. A flock of egrets flew down the river, pink angels bound for somewhere. After dinner we sat in full moonlight listening to the sounds of the night rising from the shadows of the far shore. This I felt was Africa as she should be. I began to feel less cheated. We only needed drums and a fleet of war canoes moving silently down the river, the turgid swirl of crocodiles taking to the water from moonlit rocks, the rasping cough of a leopard coming to drink, invisible in the dappled milky light . . . My imagination threatened to go berserk.

"It's a very pleasant spot," said Harold.

'Enchanted' was the word I should have used, but I did not quite like to. The night turned cold and we went inside to the friendly hiss of lamps and the crackle of a mountainous log fire. Sometime in the middle of the night we started back.

On each side of the rough road through the bush we saw the glow of night apes' eyes, and two little deer

bounded white in the headlights. Once on the tarmac, Harold wasted no time; the small car rushed through the silver night, up and over and down the long smooth hills. Trees hurled themselves past, and black rounded huts squatting by dying fires. Above, cold and stationary beyond the minute turbulence of our passage, a million stars prickled on the velvet skin of night.

As we hurtled across the darkened Copper Belt at a hundred miles an hour I sang formless songs, excited well beyond the bounds of sanity by the intoxication of the moment.

Janet dropped me at the office of the underground manager early the next morning; he took me to change into the heavy clothes worn for going below—a thick woollen vest to my knees, overalls, nailed jackboots, a belt supporting a large battery and a torch on the end of a rubber lead. A smart red plastic helmet completed the outfit.

“You’re hot in that rig-out, but believe me, when you get down to two thousand feet, that vest’ll come in handy.” The Mine Captain who was to be my guide was a stocky South African with the grip of a bear. Together we waited in the sunshine by the door of the cages, hearing the whine of the cables as the lifts moved up and down from the various stages. African miners stood beside us not speaking.

“Ever been deep?” asked the guide. I shook my head.

“She drops pretty quick but you won’t feel it after the first few feet.” The cage arrived, disgorging dirty men who blinked in the strong light. We piled in, a sign said the cage could hold sixty-eight men, we were twenty which was fortunate as the cable looked thin. Bells rang shrilly, the cage driver turned a handle and we plummeted into the depths, but without discomfort. We dropped to fourteen hundred feet in a very short time indeed and stepped out into a whitewashed tunnel. Water ran along

deep drains on each side of the railway track and dripped loudly on every hand.

I followed the short, square man for half a mile along a deserted tunnel, silent save for the drip of invisible water, and the scrunch-scrunch of our large boots. At intervals small arc lights illuminated segments of the dark dripping tunnel. We passed nobody, we heard no human sound, the interval between the lights grew longer; I hoped he knew where he was going, for it seemed we could very well walk for ever into black nowhere. The cold of the nether world steadily increased till I could feel the chill against my sunburnt skin, boring into my rapidly tiring bones, for the guide walked fast over the stony track between the rails that stretched away towards the distant purring hum of some mechanical contrivance.

It turned out to be the sound of gigantic fans shoving air along fat ventilation pipes to dank and gloomy corners where men worked by the light of their bobbing torches hundreds of feet from sunshine and clean air.

"We're getting into the ore body," said the Mine Captain. "Stick close to me and don't go off on your own." Did he think me mad? Perhaps he did. We plunged into a labyrinth of narrow tunnels, in complete darkness except for the tiny pinpoint flash of torches. Every so often we passed sinister little offshoots, dim and hazy with red-tinged smoky dust; figures moved in the murk and the racket of the drills was indescribable.

Like a motorist signalling a change of direction he stuck out his left arm and we entered one of these offshoots and picked our way over tumbled rock to the ore face itself. If the smelting sheds had been inferno, then this indeed was the Satanic mills. A reeking tumult of dust in the choking air, of mud underfoot and water sloshing in the rubble; of hissing spray and concentrated din as the hoses played on to the boring bits. Torch beams jerked and stabbed, giving brief glimpses of black faces, the quick glint of teeth and eyeballs, of soaking bodies bent to the

drills; the green glitter of the copper streaked across the streaming walls. The bore holes showed as little black eyes in the rock; a white overseer prepared the long sticks of dynamite, sitting on a packing case. He grinned through the mask of grime, pushing the helmet to the back of his head.

Men were shoring up a horrible-looking overhang of jagged rock, the thud of the sledge-hammers practically inaudible. Take three pneumatic drills, put them in a small low room, turn on a high-pressure hose and fill every available square inch with large muscular men all going about their business with picks and shovels in the dark, and you may get some little idea of what it was like at the rock-face some fifteen hundred feet underground. The Mine Captain put his mouth to my ear and yelled: "They're going to blast, I'll have to take you out of it."

I remembered the piece of paper I had signed up above, in the ordinary sunlit world we take so much for granted; something about . . . 'At your own risk . . . I hereby accept full responsibility for . . . Roan Antelope Mine . . . not held liable . . .' I nodded. We went back to the main tunnel where we could at least stand up reasonably straight. I thought of the dynamite being prepared and fused under those conditions and, remembering certain experiences with explosives, I shuddered.

Farther on we stopped for my guide to hold a torchlit conference with three gang-leaders. A map was consulted; their talk meant as much to me as a meeting of mad witch-doctors. I wandered down a side turning, came to a rough barricade, started to climb over, thought better of it and shone my torch. The beam shone straight down into nothing. I kicked a stone over the edge and seconds later heard the faint sound as it struck bottom. Surely there should have been a warning sign: 'Hole in the Road' or 'Mind how you go'. William Collier nearly had a lot to answer for.

I rejoined the conference as the warning hooter sounded,

and I sat on a pile of timber and waited, tensely conscious of the seconds passing. The blast of the distant explosion struck hard against my eardrums; dust floated round the hunched figures with the map, and pieces of roof pattered on my smart red helmet.

The hooter blared at frequent intervals as we walked through those endless tunnels; above and below us the dynamite blew more copper rock from the ore body, and the whole honeycombed lair shook and trembled, forcing loud squeaks from protesting timber supports. The rock is collected into trolleys and carted to inky voids or stopes opening off the tunnels; there it is tipped into the abyss, to fall rumbling and roaring into large steel boxes far below, passing on the way through the heavy mesh of the massive sieves called grizzlies.

Down in the dark bedlam of explosive and tumbling rock there seemed so very many different varieties of death lurking round every corner and at the lip of every unidentified hole. We went deeper, to eighteen hundred feet, climbing down vertical muddy ladders, and at each stage it grew colder and danker and wetter. Our boots rang loud on the rungs, for the ladders fell into narrow cylinders cut through the rock and in those wet and shiny tubes the silence was startling. The fans were not functioning at one point and the air hung stagnant and sour.

At eighteen hundred feet we stepped from darkness into light, into another whitewashed tunnel with gleaming rails and coloured lights and men walking upright. There in a little glass-walled hut we sat and rested and drank strong tea. It was possible to speak normally and I asked the Mine Captain very many silly questions which he answered with patience. How many Africans were employed? About eight thousand, but not long ago it had been eleven thousand. Now the work had been modernised, more machines, new methods. Oh, yes, they get good pay all right. I should think so. We mill six million tons of ore a year to produce something like eighty-five

thousand tons of copper. Six million tons plus all the surplus rubbish that comes with it. Profit? In the good days copper stood at four hundred pounds a ton, but now it's something like one hundred and sixty. Eighty-five times four hundred; a lot of money, in thousands. In millions rather. Thirty-four million pounds—and that is only one mine.

"Outside the diamond mines this must be about the richest strip of land in the world." He was happy in his work, had a nice house, a family; very good pay indeed.

"I'd like to see the Union again. It's a fine country, man!" Are the Africans good workers? Under a good leader, yes, as good as any. Hell, man, they're quick to learn, bloody quick! Was it true there was a lot of unrest on the Copper Belt? Yes, he thought it was.

"Agitators are hard to spot in a place like this. The blacks want more share in the mines, they say the mines belong to them anyway, it's their land, that's the argument. Christ, man, who developed the Belt? If they'd been left to themselves they'd still be scratching away with their fingers. I don't hold with *apartheid*, hell, no, but I don't hold with giving up everything the whites have worked their guts out for." His face was square and pugnacious, his eyes that pale shade of grey so common among the Afrikaners. His knuckles were scarred, and the puckered line of an old wound ran down the side of his chin. He looked as hard as the rock he was mining. The glass windows rattled from the shock of another blasting.

"That's below," he said. "Two thousand five hundred." He took the remains of a battered cheroot from the pocket of his leather jerkin. We sat talking for an hour. A young gang-leader appeared with blood on his face, thick with dust.

"A fall at number thirty-eight."

"Anyone hurt?"

"No." He washed his face in the basin, dabbed at the long cut on his cheek.

"How bad is it?"

"Nothing much. We're getting it cleared."

"Better get back there, I'll let them know up top."

"Thanks, that's what I came up for." He drank a quick cup of tea, went out holding a handkerchief to his cheek.

"He hasn't been here long, a good lad, he'll manage. He's got a first-class gang, they like him, he talks to them, makes them laugh. The blacks like to laugh, even more than we do."

We caught the next lift for the sky—going up, ladies lingerie, household fittings—and rocketed to the surface and a hot shower. I had done no work and yet was filthy from head to foot.

"Come back some day and we'll give you a job in the mine."

He clumped out of my life, whistling.

[6]

A SUPREMELY important personage came to dinner, a man at the very top of the mining ladder, a general manager, I think. A tall spare man from Johannesburg. He did not say much at first, but Mrs Manager made up for his preoccupied silences. She was a short, blonde woman very smartly dressed and full of personality, character, go. Her tall, spare husband whose word was law in the mine and whose decisions might mean millions lost or gained, whose very presence might quell the beginnings of revolution, appeared to be totally overwhelmed by all that personality, character and go. In a small room it was certainly difficult to escape.

But the evening was gay and soon he cast off his pre-occupation; his silences grew shorter, he blossomed. In the course of conversation I mentioned that I was interested in

birds and at once he came out of a shallow reverie, his whole expression alight. We talked birds vigorously. He told me a charming little story: of how the hoopoe got his crest. There was an African chief who wanted shade from the burning sun. First he approached the vultures but they refused, so, as a punishment, he made them bald and then tried other birds and animals but they all refused to give him shade. At last he came to the hoopoe

'Yes,' said the hoopoe 'We will bring you shade.' And they flew round and round above the chief sheltering him from the sun. In reward he gave them golden crowns. But that was no good, for the natives killed them for their golden crowns, and they flew to complain, saying:

'Your golden crowns bring us death, O Chief. We cannot go on giving you shade, for soon there will be none of us left.' So in place of the crowns he gave them their fan-shaped crest of feathers

"I don't see the point of that story," said Mrs Manager flatly. There was no particular point, but it was a pleasant little legend and he had so obviously enjoyed telling it.

I liked the one about the lion that followed beside a road watching the slow progress of a very small dun-coloured car chugging along in the dust, and thinking it to be some species of deer suddenly leapt out upon it, landing on the bonnet. With considerable presence of mind, or in acute panic, the driver swerved violently and the lion fell off. Furious, it padded after the little car. With an I'll-fix-it snarl the King of Beasts sprang again, this time on to the roof where it remained clinging desperately to its precarious hold, its great mane dancing in the wind, its mouth and eyes filling with dust while the terrified man inside swerved and braked and accelerated, striving to dislodge this awful Old Man of the Bush.

"What happened in the end?" I asked

"I've no idea," he answered gaily. "Perhaps he's still driving, with the lion still hanging on." Mrs Manager looked plain disgusted. He was happy as a sandboy with

his extraordinary stories, thoroughly relaxed and at ease. I was sorry when the time came for me to leave.

"He's catching the Kaffir Mail to Kapiri Mposhi," said Harold.

"Why on earth would you want to do a thing like that?" asked Mrs Manager.

"I'm meeting someone there."

"But the train gets in at three-thirty in the morning. You're surely not going to meet anyone at that hour in a Godforsaken place like that?"

"I hope so."

"There's a rest house of course, but I doubt if you'll get in before daylight."

"I can always sleep in the waiting-room."

"The waiting-room! At Kapiri? It's not King's Cross, you know."

"Ah, well, time will show."

"Have another brandy to make it show better."

Harold drove me to Ndola and left me in the moonlight by the side of a totally deserted train. The night was cold and fresh and, working on the brandy fumes, induced in my brain that pleasant stage of semi-intoxication where problems become no more than simple pleasures and nothing seems the slightest bit important. If someone had appeared to tell me the engine had blown up or that Kapiri M. had been swallowed by an unexpected earthquake, I should have chuckled in his face and gone walking in the moonlight.

In the ticket office some men were playing cards in front of a well-stoked fire. I bought a ticket and wandered away in a trance, past Africans stretched on benches, Africans with bundles and bursting cardboard suitcases. I remember a monumental woman picking away at the curly head of a sleeping child, and a terribly thin young man frowning over a lurid paperback, his lips moving laboriously.

I found a two-berth compartment in the completely

empty train. But it was not completely empty. The two front coaches were packed with Africans sitting silently in a ghostly blue light, motionless and fixed as frozen upright corpses. I wondered how long they had been there waiting patiently for something to happen. Perhaps they were dead. If so, I should have to tell the cardplayers. "Excuse me, but that train is full of dead Africans." They would not leave their game, I felt.

I lay on the top bunk. A furtive breeze whispered along the side of the coach and somewhere a long way away an engine snorted hopefully. I continued to lie in that forgotten train, half asleep, half awake, wondering hazily how I came to be there, and whether the wheels below me would ever turn.

The door slid back and a voice said: "That'll be a quid for the coupé"; a hand switched on the light. One of the cardplayers stood in official livery writing on a pad.

"I'll give you a call in case," he said, pocketing the quid.

"In case what?"

"In case we get in on time. By the way, where are you getting off?" I told him. He wrote busily.

"I'll knock you up at three."

"In case."

"That's right."

"When do we leave?" We should have started half an hour before.

"The engine's on its way."

"Splendid!"

"We do our best."

"No one can do more."

"That's right. Well, see you at three."

"I look forward to that." Exhausted I lay back. A lot of Africans were moving stealthily outside, I could hear the low murmur of voices. I watched them storming the train from the blind side, hidden from the station. The door rumbled. A stumpy fellow in a windcheater peered in.

"This bunk taken?" I shook my head.

"Only just made it, by God. I've been walking half the night. If she'd left on time I'd have been in the dog-house and that's no lie." He smelt hot. He had the bald, brown head and seamed face of some renegade monk. The dusty stubble glistened on his fat jowls. Coach after coach completely empty and he had to come in here to make the night hideous. I sighed and shut my eyes. The train shuddered from the heavy blow of the engine.

"Look here," he said, "let me get you a drink."

"Thank you, but I won't." He shoved his head through the door bawling, "Anyone there? Heh, what about some service!" He slumped on to the bunk.

"Africa's going to pot. Nobody wants to help any more. But you'd think they could bring a man a drink, well, wouldn't you? There's no co-operation, that's what it is, every man for his bloody self!" He tried again: "Hey, boy!" He gurgled and muttered, then he snored, his legs hanging over the side of the bunk, a chewed panama hat perched on his swollen stomach.

At four-fifteen the attendant called me.

"We'll be there in five minutes."

"By God, is this Lusaka?" The renegade monk sat up with a jerk.

"Kapiri."

"What d'you want to wake me for?"

"This gentleman's getting off."

"Must be crazy, no one gets off at Kapiri. By God, I feel rotten! Never mind, I'll buy you all drinks in Lusaka."

I tumbled out of the train on to hard earth and stood surrounded by black night and as far as I could see nothing else. Only the fire of the engine flickered through the darkness, but in the flaring glow I could only make out the stems of trees. The whistle sounded, the train clanked slowly away, leaving me for all I knew in the middle of the bush.

The moon, finding nothing of interest at Kapiri Mposhi, had wisely taken itself to another part of the sky. I sat on

my case wondering what to be at, shivering in the chill of the small hours. It would be interesting to see what kind of a view unfolded with the coming of dawn. Would there be habitation of any sort? A tumbledown shack perhaps containing one white man gone native, in fearful happy squalor among his fat wobbling wives. Or a small trading post. A collection of beehive huts and 'my *dear* no one speaking a *word* of English, but not a *word*'. Still, surely there would be another train going somewhere, sometime?

A friendly little wind filled my eyes with stinging dust, an animal howled in fear or triumph or boredom, then a cock crowed loudly showing that there were human beings somewhere close.

"Good morning, sir." A pair of eyes hovered in the darkness caught in the upper fringes of a torchbeam.

"I trust you had a comfortable journey, sir. Let me take your bag for you, please." I followed him and soon could make out the shape of a long, low building and the flash of another torch.

"Ah, there you are, I was beginning to think you'd missed the train." S. was in his dressing-gown. I drank a glass of beer while he shaved and dressed.

"Unless you're in desperate need of sleep, I think we'd better get off as soon as possible before the sun is up." It seemed as though I should be done out of my view of Kapiri M. The last time I had met S. was at a very civilised dinner party in a very civilised dining-room agleam with silver and glass, astir with amusing conversation. He hunted for his socks in the smoky lamplight; beyond the thin wall about twenty people were snoring their heads off.

"Henry!" Henry appeared silently.

"Is the car ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"Right, then we'll go." A woman in a wrap came out to the car.

"You shouldn't have bothered, Mrs Rodney."

"Don't worry about me, Sir Stewart, I couldn't sleep anyway. Will we see you back soon?"

"When I next come down to Lusaka."

"It's always a pleasure to see you, Sir Stewart."

"And you, Mrs Rodney." Henry put the car in motion and as we drove away S. said:

"She runs the rest house. She's in a bit of a state at the moment, poor woman, about a man being shot in the bar, an unpleasant little incident by all accounts and one best forgotten. Well, Henry, are we going to do it in eight hours this time?"

"With good fortune, yes."

We drove directly into the sunrise and the hoar frost was glistening white on the grass beside the road; the sun appeared glaring angrily at the end of a long straight stretch of red road and if Henry could only have increased speed sufficiently we could have rushed into the very heart of the flaming fiery disc blocking our path. But it rose too quickly for us and we drove below its spinning rim, down a gentle slope and into a new day.

This was again the Great North Road, a red dirt road furrowed by the rains into endless corrugations, cutting through the pale, stunted bush, winding, climbing, descending, for thousands of dusty miles across the glare and shimmer of Africa, leading eventually to Nairobi.

The car was new and well-sprung, taking the shock of the surface through various cunningly contrived pieces of metal; Henry drove fast and well, keeping the needle close on the seventy mark for mile after mile of lonely empty road. In a hundred and seventy miles we passed only one lorry and that was broken down, leaning sadly on a small jack while the two African drivers sat huddled over a listless fire.

After four hours we stopped for breakfast at Mkusi River; the staff made much of S., obviously delighted to

see him, and the green fezes bobbed and nodded like buds in a fitful breeze as their owners brought us bacon and eggs or simply came to pass the time of day. We were alone except for a honeymoon couple who noticed nothing but each other, holding hands, gazing deep into each other's eyes and twice allowing their food to get cold. Jackets came off at Mkusi River; we drove till eleven, getting behind slower vehicles on three occasions, and that is no fun, for you drive in a swirling, blinding fog of dust. You sound the horn frantically but the driver in front has his windows closed and, besides, his old rattle-trap lorry is making such a desperate row on the corrugations that he would not hear the Last Trump if it was blown in the cab beside him. In desperation Henry began to nose forward till the bonnet almost touched the bouncing, bounding back tyres of the lorry. We were in the depths of a red cloud and saw nothing but the lurching side of the huge clumsy vehicle towering above us.

"Sound the horn, Henry!"

"Yes, sir."

"And go on sounding it!"

"Yes, sir." We were neck and neck, still in the dust. Our fate was anybody's guess.

"Put your foot down, Henry!" In his youth S. had handled racing cars at Brooklands. To him our mad, blind progress must have seemed an intolerable crawl.

"Go on, Henry, for heaven's sake!" Henry's foot was through to the sparking plugs, but what should have been the offside rear wheel was biting on alternate patches of Africa and the air as we hit what in any ordinary country would have been the road verge.

Then suddenly we were through into sunshine again, the lorry already invisible in our own dustcloud.

"You should have gone straight through, it never pays to hang about when you're passing anything." S. dusted himself down.

The car was as pleased to stop for petrol as I was for

coffee, and she sat in the shade of a spreading tree, expanding and contracting and sighing to herself. A minute woman, an overloaded mushroom beneath a perfectly enormous straw hat, brought us coffee and tomato sandwiches. A man like a black runner bean turned the handle of the petrol pump, extremely slowly so as not to strain anything.

The bush stretched limitless before us, grey and olive-green, uniform and trembling in the heat. There were no tall trees to break the flat glaring surface but in the far distance a darker line that might be mountain or cloud. There seemed no very good reason why that burning stunted landscape should not go on for ever.

"A few miles up the road there's a Mission where we might call in. I'd like you to see it. Two of the nuns are rather beautiful, and their church is worth seeing."

A few miles? Ten or fifty? On the Dark Continent distances are deceptive. As it turned out the Mission was not far, but we saw no more than the tower of the church and neither of the rather beautiful nuns. For there was a very loud bang from somewhere below us and then, as Henry slowed to sixty, another even louder. At once she lost her feel of confident springiness; she sagged and things began to scrape.

"Damnation!" said S.

"I think we have lost a wheel," said Henry calmly.

In racing parlance she had thrown a tread. The tyre, or what remained of it draped round the hub, was too hot to touch.

"The pressure builds up pretty quickly on these roads in this heat, that's why I insisted on tubeless, but it doesn't seem to have made much difference." Children materialised out of the virgin bush; solemn and round-eyed they watched us change the wheel, sitting in the shade while we turned to sweat rags in the blaze of the midday sun. I think they probably thought us a little bit silly. Grease in that heat is terribly runny and disgusting.

S. took the wheel and put the unfortunate machine properly through its paces for the next hour till we stopped at Monkey Town for a picnic lunch.

"The children christened it Monkey Town years ago. We used to come out here for picnics. Now there's not a monkey left. All along this plateau you could see elephant and buffalo but they've all gone, driven away by the road. It's very sad really. You remember the elephants, don't you, Henry?"

"Yes, I remember them, and the buffalo going down to the river to drink." The country was steeper now, more jagged and rocky, cutting into the sky, opening out into sudden startling views; the road held more corners, the hills were longer. We were on the Muchinga Escarpment and entering a harsher land, a more magnificent land. The hills were turning to mountains, very like parts of the Apennines, the valleys to ravines, the rocks to boulders; we sat among a huge jumble of grey boulders looking across a deep thickly-wooded valley to the long crest of a hill that was almost a mountain.

"The groves of trees you see in the hollows of the mountains over there have grown from seeds dropped by birds a thousand years ago." A razor edge lay along the tops of the great trees, like the grey spine of a huge grey animal. "The whole range is known as 'bwinge Mfumu' which means a Multitude of Chiefs. It's rather a pretty story and illustrates the readiness of the African to laugh at himself or anyone else. One bitterly cold winter's night a party of Chiefs had got parted from their retainers and were lost on the mountainside. 'Let's make a fire', said one of the Chiefs. 'Yes, indeed', replied another, 'you light it'. 'No, I am a Chief, I don't light fires. Ask this fellow'. 'I'm a Chief too, I don't light fires'. And so it went on all night, and the fire had not been lit when, at dawn, their retainers found the Chiefs, dead or nearly dead from the cold. A proud lot."

Monkey Town was very quiet and from the silence

we could well have been the only living creatures within miles, yet there are still animals in the deep valleys, shy and unseen, shunning the sound and scent of man. But the elephant herds have departed, the buffalo, too, and not even the monkeys play in the trees: only the internal-combustion engine is heard, only the filthy smell of petrol fumes hangs occasionally in the hot, silent air. A lorry backfires with the ugly sound of a shot echoing away from hill to hill.

Every now and then, with a terrible alien commotion dust rises, swirls in the leaves of rufous trees, then settles back gradually thinning in the sunlight. One single living thing and that empty beauty would be complete, just one, even the very smallest of birds, or a bee, a fly, a gnat. There was not even a wind to stir the leaves. The whole land might have been in the hard frozen grip of thin shellac.

Henry drove more slowly, for the roads did not encourage speed and he was somnolent from the heat and the sandwiches and the warm beer. Soon we came to a cross-roads surrounded by huts and on a large sign saw the magic word, Shiwa. From then on our way led downhill and the dust was inches deep, the ruts were well-defined. The trees grew taller here, gum trees rising straight and blue above the scrubby bush; wide areas were cut and cleared, black ash thick on the ground. We came slowly round the corner of a steep, red bank.

"Stop a moment, Henry." The car slithered to a stop.

"Well, what d'you think of it?" I gazed down upon a great shallow valley stretching to the distant mountains, and in that valley lay a great blue lake; I could find no possible words to do justice to what I saw and feebly I said: "It's—it's unbelievable!"

The blue of the lake, the blue of the sky dusted with wispy cloud; the green and the gold of the shores, the deep dark red of a road winding through clumps of trees of a green so rich and so lustrous that they could have been

trees of jade—whoever had arranged that view knew how to handle his colours and his contrasts.

“Shiwa Ngandu, the Lake of the Crocodiles. Sometimes it is black, sometimes silver and sometimes as you see it now. I’ll bring you up here one evening and then you can see it as the Lake of the Sunset. I’ve known this view for close on thirty-eight years and I feel just the same as I did the first time I ever set eyes on it.” A little cloud crept across the sun and the shadow ran very swiftly over the water darkening the blue to black. “Henry feels the same as I do, more so probably, as it’s his lake or rather the lake of his people who came to settle on its shores from the Congo two hundred years ago.” Henry leant forward on the wheel of the most modern of cars, staring at Shiwa Ngandu from beneath the peak of his jaunty chauffeur’s cap, his dark eyes intent and serious.

We dipped down into the valley, past a baked-brown airstrip and came between an avenue of splendid eucalyptus trees and cypress to the house of Shiwa.

[7]

IN 1914 a young man on the Boundary Commission looked down from the crest of a hill and saw the Lake of the Crocodiles, and from the moment of setting eyes on it he decided that this was where he would make his home—in this broad valley surrounded by the brooding grey hills, on the shore of this fabulous lake. In his journal Livingstone wrote: “We went along a rivulet till it ended in a small lake, Mapampa or Ghimbe, about five miles long, one and a half broad. It had hippopotami and the *puku* fed on its banks . . .” He had a little dog, Ghitane, of which he had been very fond, which was drowned in the lake as they crossed Ghimbe at the eastern end (opposite where the house now stands).

One reads: "... he must have swam till he sank . . . and, poor thing, perished in what the boys all call Ghitane's water . . ."

In 1920 the young man returned from the shambles of Flanders to Shiwa Ngandu and started to build his home in a land seen by very few white men, a hard unco-operative land, a land that would have no patience with weaklings or fainthearts crying for assistance and pity. He did not cry for either, but settled among the Bemba people and slowly, laboriously, built his home, made his roads, his garden; planted his trees and hacked an airfield from the bush by the lake.

The people accepted him, and helped him to build the great rambling house in the shadow of a towering grey hill, and worked at the lovely terraced garden. They accepted him as the lord of Shiwa and christened him *Chibembere* or Rhinoceros, and brought him their joys and their sorrows even in the early days when he still lived in a grass hut and hunted for his food. And they not only accepted him but came to look upon him with affection and trust.

That I saw when we arrived at the house to find a deputation at the front door. They bobbed down in little curtsies as he stepped from the car, saying: "*Mwapoleni, mkwai.*" (I greet you, sir.)

The house servants in white, the gardeners, Yorum Jia, the fine old man from Nyasaland, godfather to one of Chibembere's grandchildren, Spider, the carpenter—they all greeted S., laughing happily to see him back from his journey across the seas. He listened to them and spoke to each in turn touching their hands, murmuring: "*Cine, cine.*" (Indeed, indeed.)

"*E mkwai,*" they kept repeating. (Yes, sir). *Mkwai* is a word, in common with many others in the Chibemba language, which can mean different things depending on the intonation. 'Certainly, it shall be done'; 'Fancy that!' The scene enacted in the sunshine outside the spacious

house would have irritated many progressive and no doubt sincere social reformers to a frenzy of protest. Feudal nonsense, they would mutter. Black slaves going on their knees to the Lord of the Manor. Exploitation of ignorance. Suppression of human rights and dignity. And a lot more. But those were happy people who went on their knees not in servility but because it is their custom, and because they wished to show their respect and liking for a man who had brought them great benefits.

His daughter Lorna was there and John her husband and two small and lively children; a mass of excited dogs. It was a vivid and vital scene. But it was the house itself that held my attention. When you think of houses in Africa, you think of tin-roofed bungalows, white or yellow, some large, some small, but single-storied, flat and with no great air of permanency.

Shiwa looks as though it has stood for many years and that it will stand for very many more. One visitor had described the house as being 'pure Italy'. It is not pure anything. It is simply Shiwa. Built dashingly without expert architectural advice, with soft-coloured bricks made of hard baked clay from the swamps of the lake—roofed with home-made tiles, reddish brown. It is true there was a certain hint of sienna in the colouring of the walls and roof, not quite so red perhaps, more subdued, sucking in the sunlight.

The windows were Romanesque, the balconies arched and picked out in white brick. Creepers straggled across the broad front and a large silken yellow flag flapped uneasily in a fickle breeze. The house was built at different levels following the contours of the ground. Different pieces had been added at different times (small jutting porches and covered verandas), yet the whole produced an effect that fitted perfectly into the land; nothing clashed; without conscious effort it was part of Africa.

Everything had been constructed with native labour, even the ornamental iron gates on the terrace; a good

deal of the furniture, the plumbing, the electric wiring—everything. Certain items had been transported from the Great Outside: cement, nails, glass and putty, door knobs and locks. Thirty years before there had been rock and scrub and now there was this. It was a remarkable achievement, the result quite certainly unique.

In two hundred years, what? A palace or an overgrown ruin telling of some strange bygone civilisation? The house is still being built. The main structure took five years to complete but I doubt if ever it will be possible to stand back, sigh and say: "Now it is really finished."

My room was large and high, beamed with heavy black wood. The floor was made of red lozenge tiles, the furniture was heavy and dark; the curtains and the carpets were gay; hot water stood in a gleaming brass jug. I washed away the dust of three hundred and fifty miles, looking out over the lawn and the roses to where a blue splinter of lake showed between the bleached and peeling stems of the eucalyptus trees. They were straight as lances those trees, a hundred and fifty feet high, with strips of bark hanging in rags round their ankles. Birds moved noisily in the flame tree just outside one of the windows and I could hear the industrious murmur of bees.

I wandered along the paths, up and down the stone steps on to different levels of garden, among orange and tangerine groves; enthralled by the colours and the scents of the hibiscus, the canna lilies, the cloying white flowers of the frangipani. Passing from the shade of the cypresses and the jacarandas to the bright paths of sunlight, I heard voices and laughter and the hard clink of metal against stone: a file of girls passed carrying earthenware jars on their heads; their eyes were bold and dark and hinted slyly at laughter. Smoke rose above distant trees; somewhere a circular saw whined and slowed as it bit through wood.

Often while at Shiwa I had to pinch myself good and hard to make certain I really was in such a fantastic,

such an idyllic spot, but never so hard as during that first stroll in the garden. Blue and scarlet lourie birds swooped and planed on outspread wings or perched in the orange trees; others with yellow masks screeched and murmured confidentially like beautiful hens. Doves and shrikes and bulbuls and tiny hovering flycatchers, chattering parrots. What a paradise that garden was!

"*Mwapoleni, mkwai.*" A man leant on his short hoe. I tried my first '*mwapoleni*'. He grinned and said something else. I shook my head. He grinned again and went back to his work, singing in a high quavering tone, and the dry earth flew in dusty clouds beneath the impact of his hoe.

I met for the first time the poor deaf mute who clapped his hands in greeting, mewling his pleasure. His face was smiling; he went on with the planting of his bulbs. Later I discovered he had a wife and children and got on well with his fellows.

Sitting in the warm magnificent library sipping sherry from a fine glass, cut off from the night by the rich folds of dark red curtains, it was not easy to realise that I was literally in the heart of Africa; that within a few hundred yards of the electric lamps, the gleaming ranks of books, the portraits on the walls and the dark lustre of the furniture, wild animals hunted and were hunted in the darkness, and Africans squatted round the blaze of fires below the tall eucalyptus trees. This was all so very unlike a mud hut.

Crocodiles moved in the waters of the lake and there we were, immaculate in dinner jackets ensconced on the most comfortable of sofas; leopards padded silently along hard tracks over the shadowy hills and there we were, toasting our shiny evening shoes at a hissing log fire and talking of London. On the far side of the lake the big black buffalo were perhaps feeding while we helped ourselves to more sherry from a beautiful decanter and Kasaka appeared soft-footed to announce dinner, as though we sat in the opulent room of an opulent house in Belgrave

Square. One expected to hear the murmur of traffic and not the subdued booming note of the hammer-head from the shore of Ghitane's water.

We dined by the pleasant light of candles in holders; large prints of a religious nature hung on the walls; the glass and the silver sparkled in the subdued fashion of perfect taste. We ate roasted hartebeest, not unlike a mild form of venison; drank most excellent wine, watched over from the shadows by the tall, silent figure of Kasaka. The others talked of local happenings and I listened avidly. There was so much I wanted to ask and to learn. I did not know where to begin. But you cannot rush at Africa, you must allow her to come to you in her own time.

On my way to bed I went from port and cigars and comfort, to stand below the flame tree. I saw the cypresses as dark pencils pointing to the stars, heard the cacophonous music of the frogs from the lake, the gentle rustle of the leaves in the cold night breeze. The darkness was alive with little sounds, but none were jarring or discordant; even the singing I could hear, though weird and haunting, was not unattractive and was as much part of the soft darkness as the sigh of the wind in the eucalyptus trees. The cold struck through my thin evening clothes and unwillingly I went to my room.

In bed I tried to read a book by one of our more distinguished novelists, but it was useless; in such surroundings his long and often incomprehensible sentences seemed even more sterile, lifeless and precious. The curtains rippled slightly in the wind which carried the sound of that strange unearthly singing, the muted voices of a million frogs and other unfamiliar, intriguing little calls and cries. The small thud of the electric-light engine began to slow, the lights to die and finally go out. I realised just before falling asleep that not only had I read some ten pages of distinguished writing but that not one distinguished word had made the slightest impression on a mind already well under the spell of Shiwa.

Into my dreams came the sudden sound of a drum. For a while I lay not knowing where I was, who I was or why I was, neither asleep nor awake, listening to the urgent throb of the demon drummer. Then I saw grey light filtering through the curtains and knew I was still alive. The rhythm of the drum was fast and lively and very skilful. From the window I could see a figure hunched over the drum, a flurry of hands and sticks in the misty dawn.

When I inspected it for the first time, I touched the taut worn skin reverently as one would the club used by Neanderthal Man or leather breeches preserved for centuries in some bog. There was writing on the side—tribal hieroglyphics no doubt. Then something made me peer more closely. I wish I hadn't, for what I read was 'Castrol Oil', upside down. The drum was beaten unmercifully five times a day: at five-thirty to wake everyone to the very borders of the Congo—one day when I was out in the hills at least four miles from the house I heard the drum as clearly as though I stood beside it, echoing and reverberating down the long valleys—then half an hour later to sound the start of work; at noon; then again at two o'clock to end the midday break; and finally the welcome sound echoed in the valleys at four to signal the end of toil. I shall hear the exhilarating call of the Shiwa drum till I am put underground, and very likely long after that gloomy little event. It was a sound once heard never forgotten, like the sad defiant note of a ship's siren.

S. was up and out every morning at the call of the second drum, driving to see the cattle, the clearing and planting of the trees, the sawmill, the hospital, a dozen visits in the grey chill of the early morning. But before he was back the sun was clear of the hilltops, the mists were steaming as they rose off a lake turning to the blue of another blazing day. There was one spell of four days when the clouds hung low, scudding before a bitter wind, blotting out the hills; the leaves dripped miserably, the cold was raw and the lake remained obstinately the colour of dirty steel.

We would breakfast off porridge and fish from the Crocodile Lake.

"Do exactly what you like," said S. and meant it. "John and I don't have much time for entertaining during the day. I hope to goodness you won't be too bored."

Bored! How could anyone be bored with all those miles of Africa to explore? With that lake to see with its myriad birds. Those friendly polite people to watch. A person who could be bored in such circumstances should be put down painlessly as being unfit to inhabit what can very often be a remarkably wonderful world.

"Why don't you take my rifle?" suggested John; "then you can go anywhere, prepared for any of life's little emergencies."

A valley stretched north from the house, bordered by a vast, jumbled wilderness of steep rocky hills. A path followed the valley, climbing gradually to cross the watershed at the northern boundary of Shiwa Estate. I used to start out along the path for a mile, two miles, then branch off into the hills, with the rifle and fieldglasses, and sometimes sandwiches in my pocket.

I covered a lot of ground, moving slowly and carefully, watching and listening; about a hundred miles one way and another. I left at two in the full heat of the day and did not come back till the sun was well down. There was little proper shade and I usually removed my bush jacket and walked naked to the waist in the full unwinking eye of the sun, but suffered no worse effects than occasional thorn scratches. I lapped up the heat. It was not the awful heat of the coastal plains, for the air was always tempered by the cool breath of five thousand feet. There were few animals; later when the water grew scarcer there would be more: roan antelope, bushbuck, waterbuck. Now and then lions appeared, elephants moving from somewhere to somewhere, buffalo. I never saw anything larger than a duiker; I shot one, a tiny little creature between a hare and a roedeer in size, with a rich chestnut coat and minute

feet. I carried it home and was fêted by the houseboys as though I had killed a leopard single-handed with a blunt penknife. The meat was delicious, and eating it I felt less of a wanton killer.

In the hollows between the hills were open spaces of white sand marked by the tracks of duiker and pig and wild mountain cat. And leopard. For leopards lived in the hills, well hidden and secretive as night itself. After dark they were apt to come down to the house, attracted by Lorna's Muscovy ducks and chickens or by the thought of so much dogflesh. They are partial to dogs, or perhaps they simply cannot stand their yapping voices. I had a great longing to find a leopard, watch it, stalk it (if such a thing is possible) and possibly drag it home in triumph to a chorus of *e, mkwais!*

I went out one morning before dawn. The moon was still high, making the shadows very black, the exposed faces of the hills very hard and bright. I walked quietly through the silent silver wilderness along the dazzling white path. I sat by the edge of the swampy *dambo* as the grass drew colour from the dawn, changing slowly to bronze. The light on the hills became softer, the rocks glowed like molten silver, the shadows scampered away and the sun burst into the sky. A small river ran beyond the *dambo*, through the oil palms, and mist hovered challenging the sun, and higher still a superb black and scarlet eagle planed on inky wings.

But on the first expedition alone I ventured no farther than the cluster of hills just behind the house, clambering slowly up the steep, rock-strewn slope and turning at the top to look out across the lake and the shimmering valley, the rich green roof of the big trees round the house smudged palely with the blue of the gums. Looking north I could see along another great valley bordered by hills which in any other land would have been called mountains. I went down into a hollow where the rocks and thorn gave way to open patches of white sand. I

wandered on and on, for there was always another little hill to climb, another corner to see round, and who can resist the impulse to reach the top of the next crest, to peer round the next corner?

This was not the same as the bush near Lusaka. This was not a suburb. This was not tourist Africa, this was Africa unchanged in a thousand years; except for the lack of animals. I found tracks that I was too inexperienced to identify by the prints of small feet in the white sand; I heard a sudden fierce, coughing grunt and a flurry of movement in the bushes, but saw nothing. I clutched my stick, prepared to sell my life dearly, but no savage beast leapt at me from the shadows. Two black beetles misbehaved in a glaring pool of sunlight.

"Probably a baboon," said John as we sat at tea. "Could have been a leopard, but quite likely a baboon. The sentry I expect, usually a promising young fellow posted to keep an eye on things. They can sometimes be quite nasty, they pelt you with rocks, especially if they think you're after their perfectly hideous children." Lorna poured tea from a silver teapot. On the lawn a garden-boy sprayed the roses with a powerful hose, and the dogs chased each other in and out of the rainbow jet—two salukis with immensely long legs and two terriers with ridiculously short ones. A procession of red-nosed ducks waddled towards their mud pool; hens scrabbled in the dust at the foot of the matted hill. Somewhere someone was using an axe, the blows rang hard and hollow through the peaceful evening, and the call of the tambourine doves was soft and soothing as the sound of the sea on a distant shore. Women's laughter rose through the trees with the lazy smoke of cooking fires; the blue sliver of lake darkened almost as I watched, and the colour of the house changed to a deeper russet red.

"Tomorrow I'll show you round," said John.

In twenty thousand acres there is a lot to see, especially in such a hive of activity as Shiwa. The business of the estate was conducted in a little office in a little brick house at the foot of the avenue. John sat in the chair of state, beside him sat the assistant manager, Mainbrace, from Bradford and new to Africa. Two Bemba clerks assisted with the paperwork; one was a tall, very personable young man named Paul, the other was small and perky.

The road led past the office and on the grass verges squatted a large collection of locals gathered to buy things at the store, to complain, to inquire, to collect their meat ration, to gossip, or merely to stare at Mainbrace. Lorries from the Great Beyond used to draw up outside the office, and the cars of stray visitors; there were a petrol pump and a post office run by a Mister Mushroom, and a little way up the road, in the shade of the blue gums, the store and a row of very small tailors' shops.

Opposite the office was a tree where quite often the carcass of an ox hung to be dismembered and distributed among the women. Along the road beyond the tailors' shops was the sawmill and the shop where Spider ran up his masterpieces from the wood of the great bleached logs; the sawdust spurting from the whining saw smelt rich and rare.

"We are pretty well self-contained," said John. They had their own carpenters, builders, craftsmen, blacksmiths, fishermen, hunters; they had cattle, cross-bred Angoni, and red South Devon/Afrikaner with the long horns of cowboy steers, which by day roamed the countryside in the care of herdboys; at night they were herded within the fourteen-foot safety of thorn stockades.

"These *kraals* are supposed to be lion-proof. I don't imagine you'd believe me if I told you a lion's been known to jump over something very like this, carrying a half-grown bullock in its teeth. Lions don't often venture into the *kraals*, as a matter of fact, but go up wind and try to stampede the cattle into breaking out and into the jaws of

the lionesses waiting down-wind. We hardly ever get bothered by them, which is a good thing, especially as I'm expected to go out in the middle of the night and do a white hunter act."

S. had built a hospital in the early days; now it was taken over and run by the Government and a resident doctor lived on the place. There were schools, one for boys, one for girls and a co-educational establishment for infants. There was also a small rest house for the comfort of travellers.

We wandered through a nursery garden and saw the minute ranks of Portuguese cypress and firs planted amid a network of irrigation canals supervised by a tiny black gnome in long shorts and with a piratical red handkerchief on his head. We walked through the blighted orchards of lime and orange trees, every tree a dead or dying skeleton.

"The remains of a flourishing industry ruined without warning by some die-back disease which they say is incurable." Those miserable remnants used to produce the essential basic oils of expensive scents and perfumes—and now? Now a few small withered limes hang from blackened branches, incredibly forlorn in the sunshine.

But more hopeful were the areas cleared and replanted with rows of young eucalyptus, greeny-bluish squares standing out in the dense bush. John drove down the red roads through the bush, and on each side I could see the native cultivation, the patches of millet ringed by thorns to stop the wild pigs; the areas of devastation where the small axes had cut the trees at waist-level and the stumps stood mutilated and naked in the field of black ash.

"Cut down the trees, then burn them and after a while plant your garden where the ash has been lying. A method of fertilisation as old as the human race. The combination of great heat and ash makes an excellent seedbed."

"Why are the trees cut so high up?"

"Because it's less trouble. The Bantu like to cut at a

handy axe-level and save themselves effort, and it's a hell of a job to get them out of it. But then they don't think about the waste nor how horribly ugly it is; why worry about waste when they've got most of Africa to hack down, and they've got too much to think about keeping themselves fed to bother about what looks nice or whether the landscape's spoilt."

Trees were being cut down, trees were being planted; cattle were tended, ground was tilled; bricks and tiles were being made, saws were biting into timber, hammers were driving in nails; all was activity and useful bustle, no one appeared to be hanging about picking their teeth and looking for trouble.

[8]

I LEFT on the leopard expedition early, before the heat of the day had begun, and made for the top of Nachipala, Livingstone's hill, where he had stood to take bearings and get an uninterrupted view of the country.

At first I followed the path leading up the valley till I reached the dried watercourse. There I left the path and followed the track of the stream, clambering slowly through the narrow gully overhung with large grey rocks, up steep clefts where waterfalls should have tumbled and splashed, along stretches of pale sand.

Out on to the welcome plateau at the base of Nachipala and then the long laborious climb to the summit. It was a bare mountain supporting one or two stumpy trees and bushes, some flat rocks and a cairn of stones. I lay in the thin shade of a thorn tree for a while, hearing nothing but the gentle sigh of the wind and watching the quiet passage of blowsy clouds.

Then I went to stand where Livingstone had stood and looked out across the same unbelievable view that

he had seen some ninety years before. I saw almost exactly what he had seen; unchanged except for the dark green mass of the eucalyptus and cypress round the house, the white gleam of the hospital buildings and the short red curl of road.

I looked south over the lake, blue as a sunlit fiord, and over Shiwa land as far as the eye could see; to the north lay Tanganyika; beyond the mountains hazy in the west was the Congo, a mere two hundred miles, a stone's throw in such immensity of distance. Eastward was Nyasaland.

In all that vast expanse of broken wilderness there was no sign of human habitation save the house of Shiwa and far away in a minute clearing some huts and a postage-stamp forest garden. All round, in every direction, stretched miles and miles of harsh, rocky hills, deep sombre ravines and open grassy *dambos*; the pale green carpet of flat-topped acacias spotted here and there by the brilliance of a solitary flame tree. Right below, twisting through the dry and dusty hills, was the luxuriant vein of the river, bordered by palms and tall trees hung with creepers, matted with thick tropical vegetation and, on either side, a width of swampy bronze grass. Dotted about were other small valleys, darker and richer in colour, showing where water ran.

But the impression was of a hard land, and yet a beautiful land. Livingstone had written: 'I shall make this beautiful land better known, which is an essential part of the process by which it will become the pleasant haunts of man.' Fortunately it has not. There are no chimneys, no gasworks, no tarmac roads, no endless rows of identical brick houses; no pylons and no garish monstrous hoardings to offend the eye. The haunts of man do not remain pleasant for long.

I swung my glasses in slow careful arcs across the hills and along the line of the river and saw nothing move. Somewhere among that lonely mass of scrub and rock was

a leopard. But in which cave? In the shade of which rock? On the branch of which tree?

"You might search for days and never see a sign. Or you might go out one morning with a camera and find him within a few hundred yards of the house." John had not been very hopeful. Leopards are creatures of the night, working often in pairs, using the paths and lying in wait for field-mice and beetles. All that strength and speed, all those teeth and claws, and they pounce on unsuspecting mice. Something must be wrong. They do not move much by day and, even if they do, their camouflage is so superb that you must be very close before you spot them for their coat is wonderfully suited to the yellow grass, darkly spotted with shade.

The sun was already very hot on my shoulders as I started down the long, shadeless spur towards the northern end of the valley, and the rifle sling was pressing heavily. I searched several hills *en route*, moving as quietly as one is able over loose scree, dead brittle branches and through the swish of long grass. Often I stood silent in the shadow of a tree to listen, but only heard the call of a wood dove, the shrill, small cry of an unidentified bird.

Some of those hills resemble miniature fortresses; jumbled, jagged rocks surrounded by an impenetrable wall of cactus, thorns and close-knit scrub, the outer approaches guarded by crackling leaves and snapping sticks. I tried to move from rock to rock but even so my progress seemed incredibly noisy in the silence.

An occasional hornet buzzed angrily, or a lizard rustled, bringing my finger to the trigger in the most hysterical way. Two brown-tailed rabbits tore away over the rocks bringing my heart to the tip of my tongue. For, creeping about in that matted loneliness, I kept remembering how a leopard can move with lightning speed, and how it is inclined to wrap its forepaws round the back of your skull and rip horribly with its hind claws. It comes for you low and weaving before the spring.

I found those steep and silent hills very alien and very savage in the burning glare of the mounting sun, and yet I hoped with a fierce excitement to come upon a leopard stretched lazily in the sunshine or on a shaded branch, or crouched drinking at the river's edge. I thought of the triumph, and of the skin in my room at home, but never of the superlative grace and beauty of the animal I hoped to destroy.

At noon I came upon a thin trickle of water dribbling along a stream-bed not entirely parched, and stopped to eat my sandwiches hoping the leopard might come to drink. But the only living thing I saw was the glinting shape of a black beetle nosing among the crumbs of my meal. I could hear the call of the hammerhead all the way from the lake; soon a swarm of persistent flies began to plague and I had to move.

So down to the river, through short grass criss-crossed with the tracks of pig, squelching in black mud and disturbing a host of mosquitoes. From the shaded seclusion of palm trees I watched the quaint antics of a troop of monkeys as they played and bounced in the thick foliage, making prodigious leaps from branch to branch, talking incessantly and coming often to the edge of their playground to peer myopically at the interloper.

Small faces, black and fringed with brown hair, pushed their cautious way through the leaves, peered, all screwed-up like little old sailors scanning uncharted wastes of water, and then vanished. An outburst of chitter-chattering and they were away hand over hand, swinging their skilful way to safety. A lourie bird planed overhead on rigid wings, crying out in a loud, coarse voice.

By now the sun was at its highest, practically straight above and the heat came off the shimmering grass and set my feet aflame in their heavy prisons; the rocky slopes flung it back with the impact of a physical blow. I removed my boots and sat dangling swollen feet in a deep, clear pool lined with waving green weeds; not far away the

water fell over shiny black rocks. I listened to the voices of invisible frogs and the droning hum of insects; dragonflies skittered over the pool and immensely courageous beetles set out to reach the other side. The broad leaves of a banana tree took the full force of the sun above my head and the sound of the tumbling water was drowsy.

The nearest town of any size was over four hundred miles distant; no railway ran within three hundred. These facts made the moment just that much better. Not a bowler hat nor a pair of striped trousers within thousands of miles; I hugged the thought and waggled my toes in the cold water.

On the other side of the valley from Nachipala the hills rose so steep and tangled that at times I had to haul myself upwards with the aid of bushes sprouting miraculously from bare stone. Panting I reached the top and there in the midst of broken monolithic rocks gashed by the sinister black scars of cave mouths I came upon a patch of fine white sand, and in the middle of that sand was the fresh pug-mark of a leopard.

I stood still, clutching the hot rifle as though my very life depended on it. Perhaps it did. It was an easy place to think dramatic thoughts. A mass of thorn and stone towered on my right. For all I knew he was there, crouching hidden, ears flat back and tail twitching, muscles bunched for the spring I would barely have time to see, eyes baleful with fear and hatred. Nothing so much as stirred, no birds, no insects, no butterflies. No wind trembled the leaves. I have seldom known such silence in the daytime. I was alone in the wilderness. As if in answer to an unspoken longing I heard the distant beat of the afternoon drum, reverberating along the valley.

It struck me that company would have been welcome for I felt strongly, though probably erroneously, that I was being watched. I longed for a head which would swivel completely round like the mechanism of a lighthouse; it

was unpleasant, I found, to have the blind spot behind me. I froze shyly after each step, not wishing in any way to draw attention to myself.

But though I searched every inch of that hilltop and peeped warily into every one of those sinister caves I found no more traces of the leopard. The scuttle of a rock rabbit had me gibbering and the pistol crack of a branch twanged my nerves like so many harpstrings. Twice I almost blazed at inoffensive tree stumps, thinking I saw cruel yellow eyes, the gleam of a silent snarl.

I still like to think he was there, somewhere, watching and waiting lest I came too close. It makes a better story if he was. An even better story would have been if he had come bounding at me from nowhere, to fall with a coolly placed bullet between the eyes. Somehow I don't think it would have worked out that way; merely a panicky, bloodstained shemozzle among the rocks and none of this hard work with the typewriter. Be all that as it may, I did not get my rug, and a very beautiful animal remained alive.

The sun had lowered to the sharp black crest of Livingstone's hill by the time I gave up the hunt and started for home. Shiwa Ngandu had turned from blue to steel and the grass of the open ground was soft gold in the light of approaching evening. Just above the house I looked back at the dark hills. One day I would go back and search for the leopard. One day.

An imposing figure stood in the doorway, planted square and startling in the dusk. As I approached, the electricity flickered into life revealing the person of a very large monk. He was dressed, garbed is perhaps a more suitable word, in a calf-length khaki habit loosely belted round an ample girth; thick white woollen stockings vanished into stout sensible boots, and round his neck hung heavy wooden beads suspending a crucifix of imposing dimensions. On his head was a solar topee,

on his broad sunburnt face a welcoming smile, almost as though it was his house.

"Ah, the hunter I see, and how many things do you shoot today?" Not waiting for any possible reply he continued in his booming, sonorous voice:

"I am Father M. I am a White Father," he raised his topee courteously, "from the Black Forest. That is goot, *ja*? I think so." He laughed, and his beads clattered.

"From the Kongwa Mission. I am here on my bicycle to take Mass tomorrow. And you are a guest of Sir Stewart? *Ja, ja*, of course, so tonight I see you for supper, isn't it?" He strode away shouting for some converted heathen.

Before dinner, as the three of us stood by the fire sipping our sherry, Father M. subjected me to a barrage of questions.

"Sir Stewart tells me you are from Scotland, isn't it? So, tell me, what are you?"

"What am I?"

"*Ja*, what are you?"

"What——?" There seemed no end to this game.

"I think Father M. means what do you do."

"*Ja*, that is correct, what do you?" I explained.

"So, a farmer. And you write books too. *Ja, ja*, very interesting, I should like to write a book." He hitched up his smart white evening habit and toasted the back of his massive legs.

"I think I haf enough for many books." He glanced at S. for confirmation. "That is so, isn't it?"

Kasaka announced dinner. We entered the room and without thinking I sat down. An atmosphere chilled the room.

"Father M. hasn't said grace yet," murmured S. With mumbled apologies I leapt up. Father M. folded his hands. I bowed my head, closed my eyes and waited, looking reverent. Nothing happened. Had he forgotten the words? S. cleared his throat.

"Father M. has said grace," he murmured.

"*Ja*, it is only necessary for God to hear what I haf to say. Isn't it?"

The Father allowed himself quite a lot of wine and grew expansive in the warm and friendly glow of the candlelight.

"My parish is a big one. I move through it on my cycle, stopping in the villages for the nights. But some of the villages do not welcome a White Father. Your Church of Scotland has got there first and I haf to go on my cycle to the next." I expressed surprise. "Oh, *ja*, the business of the Church in the bush is competitive, isn't it, Sir Stewart?" He leant back in his chair, the very picture of a jolly priest; but his eyes were shrewd and kindly and very blue. He ran a hand across his cropped grey hair.

"Sometimes I go fast on my cycle and I get a village before the Scotchmen. It is exciting work, I think. My word, Sir Stewart, but this is ferry goot wine you haf."

Every ten years he was sent home to Germany for a few months' leave. "But," he said, "I want to go home less and less." For short spells he would rest in comparative comfort at the Mission and then back to his bicycle. Angels swooped low over the table as we sat in silence at twenty-past the hour.

"Some port, Father?"

"Ah, Sir Stewart, you are too kind, but you are sure you haf some port? You haf? *Ja*, then it will be very welcome. And what do you think of Shiwa? A very wonderful place I think, so far from anywhere, isn't it?"

I said I found it a perpetual source of wonder.

"*Ja*, *ja*, and so much done for the Bemba people. Posterity will remember you indeed, Sir Stewart." S. smiled. "Give me a few more years, Father." Father M. paused with the port glass at his lips. For a moment he looked puzzled, then he beamed. "Ah, Sir Stewart, you were speaking jokefully of course."

S. changed the subject. "When I was in Rome on my

way back last time I was standing at the corner of a street waiting to cross when a bus drew up beside me."

"*Ja*, Sir Stewart."

"And who do you think was in that bus?"

"How can we know?" said Father M.

"Forty White Fathers, and for some reason they all raised their hats to me as the bus moved off. I found the incident strangely disturbing."

"Forty? In a bus? Ah, you make another joke, isn't it?"

So the evening went forward in a pleasant atmosphere of cigar smoke and merry talk. The fire crackled and purred, the books shone softly in the warm light and the sofa grew more comfortable every minute. Father M. boomed forth on a variety of subjects, darting ponderously from the bush to the Black Forest and back again. S. suggested the very ghost of a yawn, flickered a look at the clock.

"You must be tired, Sir Stewart, *ja*. You work too hard. But I should go, for there is Mass early in the morning and my eyes should not be shut with sleep, isn't it?"

Before falling asleep I lay thinking of the tug-of-war waged by the Church and of the poor bemused native torn this way, that way; now towards Rome, now towards the Kirk; baffled by the representatives of what he understood in a hazy fashion to be one and the same God. While in the outfield, so to speak, hovered converters of other denominations acting as longstops. And each denomination ruthlessly keeping their own tally of salvaged souls.

I sat on the balcony of the little chapel and looked down on Father M.'s Mass. The congregation sang well, obviously enjoying every moment of the ritual; his acolytes performed their duties with skill and dignity, and a very small, stumpy boy in a huge bush hat was inclined to make sudden darts at the altar. Many of the

women carried their babies on their backs, either devout or doped, for none of them made a sound.

Later in the morning I attended the Presbyterian service taken by a thin, black lay-preacher. The service was held in the Chibemba language and, listening to their singing of the familiar hymns in their own tongue, I felt closer to the idea of religion than in any church at home. For that little chapel and those black people with their solemn children, with babies on their backs, illuminated by the shafts of bright sunlight, possessed the supreme beauty of simplicity.

The thin preacher was a great talker; he harangued his audience with the tongue of a fanatic, stabbing the dusty sunbeams with his long curved finger, lashing us with words, his dark eyes flaming. A black John Knox thundering against the sins of the flesh, calling upon his listeners to lower themselves without delay into brimstone.

"He's talking about you," whispered S.

"Me?" What on earth could I have done to earn this impassioned tirade?

"He is telling them how you have journeyed over many seas and many lands to visit them and that they should make you truly welcome." The torrent ceased, there was silence, then they all clapped their hands, smiling and nodding towards me. I got up and made a small bow of thanks. The service then proceeded.

After church we took tea in the shade of the veranda; the preacher, Father M., the schoolmaster, another local dignitary, Yorum Jia, S. and myself.

Penelope ran about on the lawn playing with the dogs. A string of fat clouds passed slowly across the midday sun, and wood doves murmured throatily. You could hardly have imagined a more peaceful and contented Sunday morning.

Now and then people came to call, dropping out of the sky in small silver aeroplanes. Officials, experts on trees or veterinary matters or agriculture; Government folk in pale tropical suits or tweed jackets and shorts. Their coming was the signal for excitement and a general movement to the landing-field; pointing fingers, shrill cries. The first glimpse of a glinting speck coming in from the north, circling once or twice, then swooping to earth. A surge of children towards the machine taxi-ing to rest in the ragged grass, little black legs scuttling frantically.

The emergence of Government creatures. Surprise, surprise, what will they be like? Out they bundle, brief-cases bulging importantly. For the whole long day they are shown round, feasted and wined; questions are answered, questions are asked; more food, more wine, the day is unending. Then, at last, back to the aeroplane, final handshakes, they strap themselves in; the blades tug at the air, the shouts of the children are drowned in the roar of the engines, dust spurts, the grass is flattened, and the silver shape shudders and trembles in its eagerness to leave the earth. Government noses pressed to the windows, hands waving. The aeroplane tears across the field, a cheer goes up, she's off the ground and away, soon a black cinder in the sunset.

Occasionally strangers arrive by car, usually just before lunch or in the evening when it would be too inhospitable not to offer a bed.

"It's really extremely kind of you, Sir Stewart. But are you quite sure . . . etc. etc." You cannot blame them, for Shiwa is after all a legend in Rhodesia. In Tanganyika and in Kenya I have met people who know of it by repute.

"That's the place in Rhodesia, isn't it? Yes, I've heard of it. By all accounts it must be quite a spot."

"They say it's absolutely *fabulous*."

Sometimes when events of interest take place locally

(within a radius of about two hundred miles that is) the inhabitants of Shiwa take to their cars and drive out into the great world. Such an outing was the Chinsali Show. Chinsali was the seat of local administration, the headquarters of a District Commissioner, the place where men poured out their troubles or to which they were brought to confess their wrongdoings. The Union Jack flapped in the Chinsali breezes, Bon a policemen strode here and there in huge boots; there was order and dignity at Chinsali. But every so often such places go gay and let their hair down. Crowds pour in from the surrounding bush, dressed in their finery to inspect the produce laid out in the little stalls, to stroll in the heat or sit in the shade making jokes about the other funny people, especially the white ones all dolled up in their smart tropical wear raising their panamas to each other, puce from the unaccustomed constriction of ties. Oh, indeed there is much at which to stare and laugh on such a day, eh, *mkwai*?

We started shortly after dawn in a fairly small utility type van (what was known in the army as a P.U.). In the front sat Lorna, S. and John; in the back crouched the two children, two Africans, one saluki, one terrier and myself mixed up with a mixture of cardboard boxes, bulging sacks and picnic baskets. It was very cold and excessively dusty. We drove for seventy miles.

On arrival we beat the dust from our clothes, soothed the children, fed the dogs, drank some tea out of thermos flasks and, fortified, entered the showground. Rows of small grass stalls bordered a large square of brown, balding earth. Needlework, handicrafts, poultry, vegetables—mammoth pumpkins, sweet potatoes and tiny turnips, and even a genuine groundnut. A veterinary stall, an educational stall, an agricultural stall. Lorna was roped in to judge the exhibits, S. and John were swept away by friends and acquaintances; I watched them vanish, hats tossing in a sea of black and white. I wandered happily round, clockwise and then anti. Now and then I

took a happy snap. What enormous quantities of children the Africans possess! They were everywhere, nipping in and out of the crowd, swerving, dodging, many of their small hands and mouths filled with someone else's produce. Their mothers and sisters were resplendent in their party best, the bright colours of their cotton dresses, head scarves and blood-red berets splendid against the glowing black skins. Seeing them, one got the impression of irrepressible, unquenchable vitality; every flashing glance, every shrill shout of laughter, every movement of their strong and supple bodies gave this impression of surging, untamed life. Black spivs moved among the throng, in curly-brimmed felt hats and padded shoulders on the look-out for black bumpkins up from the country. White Fathers were everywhere, smoking pipes and wielding cine-cameras, beaming and patting *totos* on their curly thatched skulls. White Sisters flitted silently in flowing robes, black boots and topcoats; they were pale of skin and looked tired, and far too good for this world. A number of men who could only have been missionaries were dotted about the arena; devout, devoted men with thick glasses protecting glare-washed eyes trying to control over-excited offspring; their suits were worn and in some cases too tight. They deserved more those men, and their uncomplaining, wispy wives, yet materially received next to nothing in return for their unsparing labours. Let us hope that their reward will come to them at some later stage. They carry the Message of God to the very depths of the bush, to people who can never fully believe or understand it, and for that noble yet perhaps misguided work they are mocked. But far from being the figures of fun drawn by some writers, they are by and large men and women of burning sincerity and very considerable courage.

We had lunch in a large bungalow on the gentle slope of a green hill; a stand-up affair of cold hams and chickens and lager beer. A strange assortment of people tucked

into the mayonnaise, the salads and the pink jellies. Various officials of the Administration plus wives; doctors, the educational officer, a pale young man with a Van Dyck beard, policemen, White Fathers, including two black ones with whom I touched lightly on a number of subjects; half a dozen of the devoted missionaries. I assisted one of them to open a bottle of beer; he made coy little jokes in an accent half German, half Edinburgh. The beer spurted over his trousers.

"Oh, dear, what can my wife be going to say about this calamity?" She looked terribly ill and exhausted as though all her strength and energy had gone into her three bouncing children. On this festive day the Church of Rome was on speaking terms with the Kirk and all was most friendly. Hands were waved, heads inclined, small jokes exchanged, they were just one great team.

One unidentified official asked me how I liked Rhodesia. He had funny speckled eyes darting about like little fish in a net, and an uncommonly pretty wife who stood out in the way of a poppy in a plain green field.

"Very much," I said.

"Good show. Meet the wife." There was no hope after that, for a group of large bronzed men moved with her wherever she went, elephants guarding a weaker member of the herd, talking extra loudly, cock birds preening and posturing before the hen.

"Lucky the mem's not here," bellowed one.

"Why's that, old boy?" bayed another.

"I'd never get away with a plateful like this, always thinking of my figure, bless her." Much mirth. The two black White Fathers gazed at him, quite inscrutable. I hope religion tempered their thoughts with tolerance.

I joined Lorna and John on the veranda; it was cooler there and much quieter. A sprinkling of missionaries busied themselves with plates of jelly.

"It's a long day," murmured John.

"Only half over," said Lorna. "Still, I gave out the

prizes without any trouble. I expect they'll make Father do the sports."

There weren't sufficient chairs for the *hoi polloi*, so John and I lay on the grass at the feet of the grandees, and very pleasant it was in the afternoon sun; through a somnolent haze of beer and mayonnaise I watched the sports.

The contestants were boys and girls, the events simple. Hefty young girls, well developed and plainly without the benefits of foundation garments, tore along the track balancing full bottles of water on their woolly heads and never a drop was spilt; youths balanced on slow-riding races or crawled busily through sacks, or buffeted each other off logs. I dozed contentedly till a Missionary child tripped over my neck. He kept running out on to the track like the brave woman who threw herself in front of the Derby horses in 1909; boys and girls thundering round were forced to fan out or swerve to avoid the troublesome mite. From one of the seats of honour S. was staring fixedly ahead; it was impossible to tell accurately what he was thinking, but one could hazard a guess. The usual gangs of ragged dusty little boys nipped about, chased by angry Boma messengers swishing viciously with canes. One of the messengers had the thin, haughty features of an ancient Egyptian, the paler coffee skin of the northern races, and he swished more skilfully than his Bantu brothers. Until the tug-of-war the crowd showed little enthusiasm but, once the strain on the rope was taken, then the uproar cracked the hot, blue roof of the sky.

In a grand finale a team of Boma messengers pulled against a team of large white men. The crowd swayed and surged, bawling, screeching, laughing till the tears poured from the dark, shining eyes. Black bare feet against stockinged feet. The spectators closed in so that the contest was waged in a dark seething tunnel. The desperate struggle inched first this way, then that. And willing helpers were driven off from the messengers' end

of the rope by canes and heavy boots; eyes started, foam gathered, muscles and veins stood out all over the place, dust swirled; the African coach fell on his face insensible, another took his place, the rope squeaked as the sun began to go down. Rome and the Kirk stood cheek by jowl urging on the white team with religious fervour; three very old Africans in filthy old felt hats screamed encouragement or cast spells upon the black team. It was a moment of high drama. Yet another African coach cracked under the pace but no matter, there were hundreds to take his place.

"Go on, daddy!" A small freckled boy clutched frantically at his father's shorts. "Oh, go on, daddy, PULL!"

Prestige was involved; huge men were visibly dying on their feet but not one among them would give way. Black would not yield to white nor vice versa. Prehensile toes clutched at the few remaining blades of grass.

"Come on, Bill, one more heave and you've got 'em!" It was quite certainly the most exciting sporting event I have ever seen.

"My goodness, you must pull, oh, my goodness you must!" The missionary with beer on his trousers was leaping in the air, crouching, fists clenched, then leaping again.

Then suddenly it was over, the black men pulled on to their faces, the white men sprawled in a great, untidy, helpless heap. A young African with a little beard jabbered angrily, gesticulating with claw hands. He did not have the bearing of a good loser. Emotionally drained, we boarded the P.U. and nosed through the black flood to the road.

Our numbers in the back were augmented by the addition of three Muscovy ducks, nervy birds which could not settle down and which pecked strongly if kicked or trodden upon. Penelope sat on my knee, tired and rather solemn; we discussed where the sun went at night and where the stars came from. Now and then we caught

glimpses of the sunset through the darkening bush and along the burning crests of the hills.

"Tell me again." She squeezed my hand tightly.

"Tell you what?"

"About the sun going to bed."

"Well, when the sun has been in the sky for all these hours . . ." The ducks murmured rustily, cold dust poured in through cracks on the canvas hood. The darkness seemed to rush by for hours. Penelope's questions became fewer, her small head lolled against my shoulder. I felt the warm pressure of a duck against my leg. Charlie burbled sleepily to himself, sensing the approaching end to a long, long day.

I discovered afterwards that Chinsali was a Congress area. "A literal translation of the term 'Congress Party' would, I suppose, be 'Africa for the Africans'. Everything went off surprisingly well today when you consider that they cut down the special Coronation tree not once but three times. Not long ago they had some function or other and the natives marched past the visiting notable singing their heads off. He sat beaming, not understanding a word, no doubt thinking it to be some fitting expression of loyalty. A White Father bishop sitting beside him understood every word and he didn't beam, not a bit. The whole thing couldn't have been more seditious if they'd hurled rotten eggs at the platform, as the song was all about throwing the white man into the nearest sea."

The doctor's house was sparsely furnished as though its owner was merely camping out in the bare rooms. One or two prints of the English countryside hung slightly crooked on the pale brown walls and a few carved animals and heads stood about on dusty little ledges. In one corner was a plain table holding a pile of old magazines and a large brass tray covered in bottles. One animal-hide rug sat very lonely right in the middle of the tiled floor

and round it stood some forlorn cane chairs; there were no curtains over the window and the room smelt of oil and tobacco. A row of worn books tumbled along an unpainted bookshelf.

But the fire was cheerful and the doctor extremely hospitable. He was a young man, dark-haired and deeply burnt except for a pale skin from which he had lately shaved a beard. His eyes behind their glasses were little ebony moons in the lamplight. His delight at welcoming guests was very real. A small terrier leapt playfully about our ankles.

"'Fraid things are a bit makeshift still—down, Mardy—keep meaning to get my stuff up from Lusaka but somehow I never seem to get around to it. Still, one day . . ." This was very much the lonely bungalow set by itself in the dark and savage wilderness with nothing to break the endless evenings but the roar of the rain or the maddening throb of drums, the weird calls of the night, the grotesque power of Africa pressing in, squeezing out the stranger. In actual fact, of course, it wasn't like that at all. And yet . . . Sometimes when he sat alone in that small bare room, in the evening, reading perhaps or listening to his gramophone, or to the thunder of the rains on the roof, then perhaps . . . But enough. This is the stuff for novelists, not for a plain prosaic tale of travel.

"I've got the Hankses coming in. By the way, what's your tippie?"

"They're German, are they?" I asked.

"I don't really know," said the doctor, being very generous with the gin. "Yes, I suppose now you come to mention it, yes, I suppose he could be."

"How are you getting on with the language?"

"Slowly, John, slowly. I can't say I'm finding it easy."

He took the pipe from its resting-place in his stocking top, filled it from the tin in his pocket; then he tore a strip of paper from one of the magazines to make a spill. He seemed strangely ill-equipped somehow.

The Hanks arrived. He was a short man with immensely broad shoulders and a flat, pugnacious face; his handshake left my fingers squashed together like sausages in a packet. He wore a check tweed jacket and tight shorts; two pipes stuck from his stocking top. Mrs Hanks was a silent, tired woman with yellowish dried-up skin, content to sit slumped in her chair and leave the talking to her husband.

As the evening progressed he poured himself a succession of deepish whiskies and flicked angrily at a faulty lighter. He held some job to do with the hospital. With the exception of Mainbrace, the Hanks were the doctor's only neighbours. One sensed by the way they spoke to each other that they had already exhausted the topics of mutual interest and were merely talking for the sake of making conversation. Mainbrace, as I knew, did not do much visiting, but sat across the way in his lonely bungalow reading the Bible.

"Fill up," urged the doctor. "No one waits to be asked in this house."

"See those marks?" Hanks jabbed towards the ceiling with his pipe. I nodded.

"Bullet holes."

"Oh?"

"Last doctor here drank a bit. He used to lie on the bed and shoot flies on the ceiling with a .318. The brandy made them big as bloody monkeys."

"It was very sad," said his wife softly.

"It was damned noisy." Hanks laughed and flicked at his lighter.

"Well, I haven't got a .318, only a shotgun; perhaps I'm lucky." The doctor chuckled apprehensively.

"You are," agreed Hanks. "You can get them all with one shot."

I imagined the room filled with cordite smoke, vibrant with shattering sound, the bullets zipping through the roof, away up to the stars.

"There was a lot of singing last night," said Mrs Hanks.

"Went on late, too; they were still bawling when I put Mardy out at one o'clock. Here, try a spill."

"Those are the people who worship the Prophetess, aren't they?" I asked. Hanke fixed me with his rather prominent brown eyes.

"That's right. Lenshina's crowd." Lenshina was an African woman living near Chinsali, an epileptic who claimed to have died and been before God, who told her to return to Earth and carry out certain things in His Name. She had collected a following in the district and her adherents in Shiwa had built a church among the tall blue gums where they gathered to hear her speak and to sing their strange haunting songs, under the watchful eyes of her appointed priests.

"Wouldn't trust 'em an inch," said the doctor. "Just another lot of mumbo-jumbo. Besides it's a golden chance for agitators."

"I agree up to a point about the last part," said John. "But not about the mumbo-jumbo. She's dead against witchcraft and . . ."

"She's dead against the White Fathers as well," interrupted the doctor.

"Lenshina against the field," said Hanke. His wife stirred herself.

"The other day I spoke to one of her women, we talked about the Prophetess, we argued and I said there could not be two Saviours, only Jesus . . ."

"I bet she had an answer," said the doctor. "They always do."

"Yes. She said: 'But it was the white men who killed Jesus, the black people were not there. So we have our own Saviour, let the white man have his.'" There was a longish silence broken by the flick-flick of the faulty lighter and whimpers from the little dog by the fire. We drifted into desultory conversation.

The doctor showed me some excellent photographs he had taken in Barotseland. At the end of the album I

came upon faded snaps of family groups, beach picnics. He talked of home, but very sadly.

"Last leave wasn't a success. I don't know, I didn't seem to fit in any more. My parents are both dead and all my friends seem to have got married or something. I don't know . . . there doesn't seem to be anything left to go home for. Think I'll go down to Durban next leave."

Without meaning to, I glanced quickly at the badly patched holes in the ceiling. Luckily he did not notice for he was on his feet, crying gaily: "Oh, come on, just one more for the road, it's early yet, the evening's hardly begun." He really did not want us to go and leave him to his solitary meal.

The Hanks walked into the darkness towards their house. We got into the car and drove away, leaving the doctor in his lighted doorway, his little dog under his arm, waving till we were out of sight. We drove home between the silver walls of bamboo and then through the aromatic scent of eucalyptus trees whose trunks shone white and spectral like the columns of a great cathedral.

I stood for a moment on the grass outside the house. The singing had stopped and, unchallenged, the racket of the frogs reigned supreme.

"I don't know whether you'd like to go out with Kalaka for a few days and see if you can get a buffalo?" S. put the wonderful suggestion to me in a calm voice as though he had merely suggested a walk in the garden. Oh, boy, would I! yelled my heart in a vulgar way.

"I'm afraid it's the wrong time of year for shooting but you never know, you might have luck." Kalaka was Henry's brother: Kalaka was a hunter who had killed five buffalo single-handed with his little axe. And there cannot surely be many men who have done that. He had a gleaming friendly smile and pale tawny eyes that were never entirely still.

"I told him you very much want to bring home a buffalo head." Kalaka said something. S. smiled.

"He says, more than a lion or a leopard?"

"Yes, more than either." Kalaka nodded his head.

"He says he will do his best for you."

"Please thank him." We parted on the best of terms. John decided he would take a short holiday and accompany me.

"That'll mean blankets, rations, pots and pans and all the rest of it," said Lorna. "How long will you be out?"

"Not less than three days, not more than ten."

"That gives me plenty of latitude for either over-feeding or underfeeding you."

"I suppose Mainbrace can cope by himself," said John doubtfully. "He's pretty new here and they'll make rings round him if they get half a chance."

"Go on out, it'll do you good. He'll manage. He'll have to." Lorna bustled round like a small and very efficient beaver, collecting all we would need in the bush. I sent a cheque to the local District Commissioner's office for the Game Licence; Kalaka gathered together a party of carriers and everywhere faces brightened at the thought of meat. Every face except that of Mainbrace who tore round in a fever at the prospect of being left in sole command. *Cinkaoka*, murmured the Bemba watching the galvanised figure rushing from pillar to post with wrinkled brown brow. *Cinkaoka*—one who rushes hither and thither achieving nothing. I think that was unfair. The poor fellow was new and could not even speak their language. He very kindly lent me his big bush hat.

"I think we're all set and if you're ready we'll start early tomorrow morning." We spent the evening checking the rifles and ammunition. John's .303, the wicked little .318 and finally the heavy solid .470, double-barrelled and lethal as a field gun.

"I've never fired a thing like this," I said, squinting through the fat, shining barrels.

“Never mind, we’ll stop on the way and you can try a couple of rounds at a tree.”

All was ready; all was packed; the day was at hand when at last I was going to get a chance at the animal which had always fascinated me—the black buffalo of Africa, that legend of cunning savagery.

I hardly slept a wink.

[10]

SOON after the second drum we set out; John, Kalaka, eight carriers and myself, wobbling on heavily laden bicycles. The *bwanas*’ bedding rolls were clumsy and cumbersome, filled as they were with blankets, spare clothing, extra jerseys, medicines and mosquito nets. The carriers each had one thin blanket.

In the old days at the close of last century the hunter would probably take, among many other essentials, a burning glass, alum, a supply of thin merino vests and a pocket mincing-machine; in his medicine chest would almost certainly have been phenacetin, Eau de Suez for the alleviation of toothache, chlorodyne (dun-coloured liquid fire for the treatment of stomach ills), opium pills, and—believe it or not—Carter’s Little Liver Pills. He, of course, was going out for weeks, possibly months; there was no wireless and no transport save his own two feet. How wise it was to think of the mincing-machine!

We went on our bicycles for twenty miles through the bush, dropping down two thousand feet into a great valley on the fringe of the Luangwa Game Reserve, and yet we were still as high as the summit of Snowdon. At first the dew was heavy and white on the grass and the chill bitter in the air; but soon, all too soon, the sun took fire and the heat clamped down.

We careered wildly over the twisting iron paths;

through the Rhodesian bush of close-growing, scrubby trees, across small, swampy streams and through patches of tall, yellow grass where there is no shade. Up steep, rocky hills and down the other side, gathering speed, bouncing and jarring from rock to rock, the Africans whooping and yelling with excitement and joy.

On and on we went with an occasional welcome pause in some village to pass the time of day and eat peanuts or sweet potatoes, while the inhabitants gathered to enjoy this rare event.

"Mwapoleni mkwai." They bobbed and curtsied and grinned. Then on to the knife-edge saddles and away, following the lead of Stanley the cook, gorgeous as any paradise bird in his cap of scarlet corduroy; and when we could not see him we could hear the loud rattle of the provision box. It was on one of these fierce little hills that I discovered that the bicycle carrying my valise had no brakes; it came tearing past, the thin, bare legs of its rider stuck out as though to catch at the branches and the grass. His only way of stopping was that of an unskilled skier, by organising a self-inflicted crash. Every time he struck the ground, he laughed consumedly.

When I fell off, I hit my head on a stone and as far as I know could not raise a smile; they picked me up, stood me on my feet and dusted me down. My head sang splendidly and all the black faces swam about in the sunshine like rocks gleaming dully in the shallows.

Farther on we stopped to try out the weapons. Kalaka dug a small square in the bark of a slender tree. John produced two enormous brass cartridges stuffed with enormous bullets and slid them into the .470.

"Single pressure," he said. "Hold her tight and she's no worse than a twelve-bore." Silence fell; even the birds stopped their desultory chatter. I closed both eyes and jerked savagely at the trigger. With a booming roar the thing went off I opened my eyes to see earth pattering at the base of the tree.

Hemingway describes the sound of a big rifle as 'Cara-wong!' And that is exactly the sound.

"Try another." John spoke kindly. I did not look at Kalaka. This time I took more care and the bullet smashed through the edge of the square, through the tree itself and away. Bravo! cheered everyone. *E! E!* Clap hands, Charlie!

"That would do for a buffalo if you took the square as the point of the shoulder." We tried the .318 and that had the sound of high-velocity, the vicious slam-crack of a flat trajectory weapon, and it was deadly accurate. Comparatively confident, we went on our way.

In the late afternoon we reached our first camp in fairly open bush. While the carriers set about making camp, I went with Kalaka to search for the hartebeest we had seen from the path. Almost at once he picked up the spoor and we followed what to me were invisible tracks; now and then I could make out the signs—a leaf here, a twig partially crushed, lengths of bent or bitten grass, a faint indentation in the hard earth. He moved absolutely silently in his worn suede shoes and I tried as best I could to follow, placing my feet where he had walked.

He saw the herd long before I did, each animal cut into narrow unrecognisable strips by the tree trunks—except in the open *dambos* and clearings you rarely get a glimpse of more than half an animal. At last I made out the long angular nose of a cow, but never began to see the bull standing right beside her in the shade.

Suddenly they turned to run and all over the place things I had taken for light and shade bounded off at speed. We followed, running fast, and found them again on a slope standing in thick undergrowth, heads and shoulders visible. By now it was evening and the light was poor; I chose a big bull at about eighty yards.

The bullet went high, whipping away among the distant trees. In the excitement I had forgotten the old adage: 'Light's down, sights down.' When the grass is

long and the cover thick, you do not get more than quick snap-shooting chances, standing.

We searched hopefully for a while till darkness came and then returned to the camp, getting close before we saw the bright flare of the fire and the glowing red stems of the trees. I found a little stockade of cut branches open to the sky and with a narrow entrance facing to the fire. John was lying on his blankets reading; two candles burnt unsteadily and insects danced above the tiny flames. I changed into thick trousers and jersey. Being tired we did not say much and lay drinking our whisky, content to watch the play of the firelight on the leaves above and to listen to the crackle of the flames, the incessant flow of talk and laughter. The hollow note of a hammerhead sounded at regular intervals and the booming of the big apes was loud during any pause in the racket by the fire.

"This is the best part of Africa," said John. To me it was unbelievable that I was really where I was, and part of it. I lay on my back staring up at the clearness of the night sky, at the stars through the gaps in the branches.

"When I was eight, I went on a six-months safari with my parents and it was like this every night. I wish it could have been six years." I understood what he meant: you could never get tired of such a life; there would be no room for boredom, no room for anything but a fierce and splendid enjoyment.

"Dinner, sah." Stanley's cap glowed like a head of flaming, shiny hair. I did not sleep much, but lay in a blissful doze half-hearing the sounds of the African night and the sudden bursts of talk; every now and then a big log was thrown on to the fire sending showers of sparks twirling into the trees.

"Tea, sah" at six; then "Breakfast, sah" at six-thirty. Produced from the fetid depths of a pitch-black saucepan.

Then we loaded the kit and set out for another ten or twelve miles, dismounted most of the time, pushing our battered machines over impossible ruts and rocks, till

we reached the bank of a brown, sluggish stream humming with mosquitoes where we made our second camp.

The natives shinned up the tall slender trees to hack off the upper branches for our stockade, handling their little axes with immense skill. John wandered off to look for guinea-fowl and I sat idle and hot in a murmuring shade to watch the antics of a chattering honey-bird as it vainly tried to interest someone in a bees' nest it knew of; they eat the grubs and, if no one will follow to take the honey, become hysterical with rage and frustration.

On the way out I had not had much time to look for birds, being far too occupied in steering my bicycle round the rocks. Doves, a selection of shrikes and flycatchers, an oriole, a harrier and a red-beaked Bateleur eagle soaring above a stony hill, that was all.

John returned with news of buffalo tracks leading towards the river, a small river winding through an open valley.

Along the river the ground was soft and swampy and the vegetation thicker and more tropical. Game-tracks led in every direction through the grass and reeds and across the black mud pools where we had to wade and squelch through the filthy stench of rotten vegetation: tracks of buffalo, of wart-hog, of waterbuck and bushpig. The buffalo spoor was old—one day, two days—nothing worth following. We climbed to the top of tall, crumbly ant-hills to spy but could see nothing but the broad expanse of ten-foot grass where a thousand buffalo might be hidden. June is too early for successful hunting, for there is still too much cover and too much water; the game is not concentrated.

A wart-hog rushed out of sight, tail straight up, going at speed; we found an antbear's hole where a lion had been digging like a terrier after a rat; now and then we caught a brief chestnut glimpse of duiker. The day seemed unending, the heat quite merciless and, though I tried manfully to be watchful and observant to right and left, the sun had taken its toll and I walked with my head bent

forward, my screwed-up eyes on the heels of Kalaka's muddy suède shoes.

Without warning he stopped, pointing silently to the ground at the imprint of a foot belonging to a very large elephant.

"Today, perhaps this morning." He was excited and the three carriers with us crowded forward to look. On the trees were long ragged scars where the elephant had amused himself with his tusks, amazingly high up.

"Very big one."

"He's quite a size, this fellow." John conferred with the hunter.

"Kalaka thinks he's very likely an outcast following a couple of days behind the herd." We stepped in his tracks for two hours, moving slowly and often stopping to look and listen. He led us across the same brown river half a dozen times and in tight circles through the rustling grass; he did not appear to be going anywhere special, merely wandering vaguely hither and thither, round and about, taking the air.

As the sun sank towards the western ridge of the long valley, so the colour drained from the trees and the grass and then, quite suddenly, it was too dark for shooting. We gave up the pursuit and went back to the camp and Stanley, empty-handed and very weary.

Stanley brought us tea, he brought us hot water in a little basin and he brought us eggs and rice and tinned marmalade pudding; we gorged ourselves and drank our whisky and relaxed in our stockade; the mosquitoes came by the score to circle the candles and dart at our faces. We crept within the nets and lay on the hard, unyielding earth of Africa.

"You're never likely to be closer to Africa than you are at this moment." As I searched for comfort among the knobbly hummocks I well believed him.

For a while we discussed the possibility of founding a business for the collection, transportation and utilisation

of elephant dung for the furtherance of agricultural effort all over the civilised world.

"How would you ship it?"

"In dried bricks, packed in sacking, a hundredweight in each bale. Why, we've seen enough in one afternoon to fertilise most of Scotland."

"Don't forget the greater bulk of it is dropped a goodish way from the line of rail . . ." We talked seriously about it as though we really meant it.

"One could always tie buckets to the tails of healthy-looking elephants and work out some kind of conveyor-belt system." Lying there in the flickering darkness inside our little stockade, there seemed nothing peculiar about our idea and I'm sure that, if we hadn't been so sleepy, we would have got it worked out to the last bucket.

The figures round the fire composed themselves for sleep, wrapping themselves in blankets, their faces turned to the fire, all except Kalaka and Stanley and Old Shikulu, old Grandfather, the headman of a village; a dirty white pillbox hat—it might once have been an American naval cap—was crammed on the back of grizzled, wiry hair above an immensely wicked old face of wrinkled black leather. He was the fastest talker I have ever heard. The spate of words poured out, a torrent rising and falling and frequently pitched high and squeaky with indignation or excitement.

Jabber-jabber-jabber and in answer the one word: "*Eeh!*" or "*Eeh?*" or "*E-e-e-h!*" Said softly, said loudly, shouted. An expressive word to denote surprise, horror, disbelief, agreement, encouragement—anything.

I could see the figures silhouetted against the flames; heads nodded, one of them stirred the fire with a stick and I could also see Kalaka's socks hanging over the fire, very lovely in the crimson smoke. They all had blankets round their shoulders, and huddled close to the heat while Old Shikulu talked, how he talked!

"Don't they ever go to sleep?" I asked after a fresh outburst of '*Eehs*', a fresh paroxysm of fire-poking.

"There's a lion about," said John sleepily. "They're nervous and that'll make them go on like this till dawn."

From the depths of my abysmal ignorance I had to ask him how he knew about the lion. In answer he shouted loudly and in the startled silence which followed I heard in the distance the deep, coughing grunts.

"He's been circling us for some time." This indeed was Africa, this was all that was needed to make the magic complete.

There came a long-drawn howl, quavering and hanging in the darkness long after the noise itself had ceased, a really horrible sound, a cry to raise the hair on your scalp. From farther away came a series of answering yelps.

"His attendant hyenas hoping for scraps. They hunt in pairs along both sides of a valley and tell each other if they've found meat. Loathsome brutes." A hyena will run in and tear living hunks of flesh from cattle, going for the udder; they will eat calves alive, and their jaws, the most powerful of any animal in the world, can meet through the thigh-bone of an elephant. The sleepers awoke, sat up and edged closer to the fire; more wood was thrown on, the flames spurting high; the talk became louder than ever. For it has been known for hyenas to slink silently in the shadows by the fringe of the firelight and rip away a man's face; or even for the whole man to be dragged into the darkness by a lion.

So the Africans, who feel closer to such things, sing and talk and tell stories and keep the fire stoked up, beating back the darkness and the powerful and dangerous creatures of the night.

"I think we may find buffalo tomorrow; that lion's very likely trailing a herd hoping to cut out a calf. At the moment he's taking time off to investigate our fire and our smell and see if there's anything to be got from us."

My dreams were shot with the hiss of sparks and the never ceasing flow of talk, and the eerie awful cry of the hunting hyena.

IN the morning John went home.

"The work's piling up and I've been idling about for long enough. Besides, you know what it's like now, so go on with Kalaka and see what you can get between you."

From soon after dawn till well after dusk we hunted for those elusive buffalo, walking in the full eye of the malignant sun through endless tall grass where there was not one scrap of shade. I drank ravenously from every grey, soapy river but even so by noon my body resembled a piece of dehydrated string. But just when I thought I could go no farther and should have to rest we had a welcome pause when I shot two impala, very beautiful deer, too beautiful to shoot but we needed meat. While they were skinned and hung from a branch to preserve the carcasses from ants, I lay flat-out in the blessed shade of a hook-thorn bush.

We left them gently twirling at the ends of long bark strips, and went back towards the sound of the river; the afternoon was purgatory, the heat concentrated as though through a burning glass down on our shoulders and backs as we moved in the glaring yellow grass. Buffalo had used the path we were on, not so very long before, and we went very slowly; the mud splashes had been recently used, and deep hoof-marks filled with chocolate water led away into thick bush covering the side of a steep hill.

In the very middle of the thickest grass Old Shikulu found droppings, very new indeed. To put it mildly, I felt uncomfortable hemmed on all sides by dense head-high grass wondering if a ton of buffalo was standing close, watching and waiting. I clutched the slippery barrels of the 470 and remembered vividly the many tales I had heard concerning the savagery and appalling cunning of the animals; of how they would sometimes wait concealed and then spring forward at point-blank range to pulverise the intruder with armour-plated heads.

A cow with calf, I remembered *en passant*, was as dangerous as a bull. Often the feathery grass stirred uneasily in the fitful little breeze and brought my finger round the trigger, the butt half-way to my shoulder. All our movements appeared to be excessively noisy, sweat dribbled into my eyes, I was tense as a tightly coiled spring, and if a sudden shadow had glided across the grass I would have blown it apart.

We found nothing, but we spoke in whispers till well in the open again.

"Mbogo there," said Kalaka, splashing water over himself.

"Oh, yes, there, very close."

Three of the boys went back to collect the impala, leaving Old Shikulu and the small squat man, naked save for tattered white shorts, who was terrified of my camera. Together we continued the search till evening cooled the inferno and the glare had softened to gloaming. We had, I supposed, covered some twenty miles by the time we reached camp and yet Kalaka brought us back to the fire without hesitation. To the layman the ability of the African to find his way through the bush is more than clever, it is uncanny.

The lion came nearer that night, lured by the scent of smoking meat, trailed by the hopeful hyenas; the mosquitoes dashed themselves against the net, questing for blood with minute frantic screams, and little invisible things moved among the branches behind my head.

I ate well at dinner, being given the liver of the impala; the boys skewered lumps of meat on sticks and held them in the flames and Old Shikulu filled a battered pot with unmentionable titbits and sat stirring his devil's brew, never saying a word, crouched misshapen, one half of him ebony with shadow, the other red with flame.

Stanley excelled himself, producing tinned peaches and coffee and a bottle of beer. I joined the others for a while by the fire and sat enthralled while Shikulu gave tongue; he was in his best dining-out form and had his companions weeping with laughter and rolling in the ashes.

Before going to bed I taped my torch to the barrel of the smaller rifle in the faint hope that a hyena might come poking round. I looked up at the stars realising that I was now responsible; I had the snakebite serum and instructions how to use it; if anyone was chewed to pieces by a savage beast, then I should have to answer for it. There might be mutiny, I thought, and I should be left, alone and boiling with fever in the darkest bush; then like some explorer of old I should write in my journal:

' . . . at dawn I saw that the boys had gone, and with them most of the supplies, all the beads and the cloth. Only faithful Shikulu had remained. Where are they? I asked. They are gone, *bwana*, he said simply. Oh, faithful, trusting savage . . . getting weaker . . . shall I ever see the dear shores of England again? A wild-eyed buffalo charged through my dreams wearing Kalaka's socks and bellowing, breakfast, sah,—breakfast, sah.'

Shortly before dawn there is silence except for the tiny dripping of the dew from the leaves and perhaps the sighing of a soft breeze; the sun rises quickly once it has begun, bursting into the mother-of-pearl sky from beyond the hills and dispersing the mists of the valleys as flame will melt the snow.

"Today we try new places." Kalaka pulled on the wreckage of his socks, put his feet into the suède shoes, whose toes now gaped like cracked, parched mouths. On the ridge above the camp we found the tracks of hyenas quite clear in the white sandy soil. Instead of heading for the river we followed the ridge for a mile or so and then descended slowly into marshy ground of difficult-going and evil-smelling mud. And there we came upon fresh signs of elephant.

Elephants create havoc in the bush, tearing down branches and often whole trees, laying flat areas of devastation very like a shell-torn wood. The sap in the splintered wounds was still damp and where the grass had been flattened there was no dew. But these great

beasts travel at a good four miles an hour, so you can follow close behind and yet not catch up, not for a day, a week, perhaps never.

The mammoth trail led us over the crest of a small *hill and down into another valley of broad dambos dotted with clusters of thick bush. On the far side of the valley* the ground climbed into a range of jagged grey hills.

We sat sucking oranges and I searched the grey, rocky slopes with fieldglasses. I saw a rock below a solitary tree, and the rock was reaching into the branches with a midget trunk. I was seeing my first wild elephant—a tiny elephant eating from a tiny tree, but alive and there within view.

Concealing my intense excitement, I told Kalaka. He did not believe me. I handed him the glasses, but how on earth to explain?

The glasses had been used in their prime for peering at such things as tanks and trenches and guns; the lenses were marked with graticules. By the use of these, much pointing, and the drawing of dust pictures, I got his eyes to the spot. He, too, saw the toy animal. My stock went soaring. The white man, red-faced, clumsy and sweating, had seen the elephant through his miraculous glasses. Was that not indeed wonderful?

"Eeh!" he breathed reverently. "*Nsofu!*"

"*Nsofu, eeh, eeh!*" echoed the devoted band, pressing round to take a look. Fame touched me with her fickle wings, and I basked in their pleasant feel.

"*Nsofu? Mbogo?*" asked Kalaka. We had chased the buffalo for two stewing days and never even caught a glimpse of a black back in the grass.

"*Nsofu,*" I said. My stock hit the roof of heaven. Is not this more wonderful still? He says elephant. Now perhaps we shall have much meat. The die was cast. I was now an ivory-hunter.

We set off to cross the valley, but before we had gone a hundred yards Kalaka froze, signalling behind him with

his hand; I went down on one knee and looked along his pointing arm.

An elephant was moving slowly across our front, ponderous and rolling but very silent as he advanced *between the trees*. A shrill trumpeting call sounded to the *right; branches cracked to the left and I saw a trunk snaking above a bush. They were all round us. The hunter* took a pinch of dust and let it trickle from his finger and thumb; it fell straight, there was no wind, but I knew how treacherous the little breezes could be. The flatulent stomachs of the elephants rumbled like distant thunder and the splintering of the branches was very loud. The animal we had seen vanished behind a huge ant-hill and did not reappear. Slowly, very, very slowly Kalaka began to go forward, his head turning slightly from side to side, half-crouching, half-crawling. I took the big rifle from Shikulu and gently slid the big cartridges into the breech, then I followed. I remember noticing extra clearly the sweat patch between Kalaka's shoulders and the tsetse flies clinging to his shirt; and I remember saying to myself over and over again as we approached the ant-hill: 'Between the eye and the ear, between the eye and the ear, and, if he charges, the chest or the knee'. Kalaka was gradually edging to his left to where we could see round the ant-hill. I had forgotten the other elephants—which shows how green I was—I had forgotten everything except the moment that lay so close ahead. The hand signalled me to stop, then beckoned me forward.

About twenty to thirty feet away the head of the elephant towered above us, looking round the side of the hill, straight at us. He was facing us, two enemies in full view, yet his little brown eyes did not see us; if a sudden mischievous puff of wind blew from behind our kneeling figures, then the tranquil scene would alter with terrifying speed, for an elephant can catch a scent at six hundred yards. 'The chest or the knee', 'the chest or the knee'.

Now and then the great ears came forward with a loud

flap-flap, the trunk curled slightly, and when that happened I longed for a hole to open in the hard earth into which I could quietly and unobtrusively drop. For they say an elephant uses his ears to fan the scent rather than the sound, and I felt we must surely be smelling to high heaven.

At about ten o'clock the elephants stop to browse and doze in the shade; this was the witching hour and quite likely his little brown eyes were tight-shut. His tusks were small and stumpy. Kalaka shook his head and cautiously we returned the way we had come. Once we were out of sight, the spring uncoiled and I felt weak and faintly trembly—not much of a hunter.

We made a wide detour to avoid the rest of the herd and set our course for the opposite hills where the ground looked more open. On the way, by the edge of a trampled waterhole, we came upon a footprint so enormous, so primeval, that I could hardly believe it possible. Kalaka measured across the print with a length of grass and held the stalk touching the ground inside his foot; the tip reached to the inside of his knee. He was not a small man.

“Big, *mkwai*, oh, very big!”

The valley had begun to climb into the grey hill where I had seen the toy elephant and we could hear on the still shimmering air the sound of tearing branches. But we did not reach our toy, for between us ran a broad river, some thirty yards across; we waded chest-deep, our feet slipping and shifting in the soft sand, the current plucking at our bodies so that we had to use every scrap of our strength to get across.

From the top of a large flat rock on the other side we tried to pinpoint the sounds of flapping ears and grumbling bellies; a grey back showed above the tall grass, then another, and more, till we counted ten; standing in the shade of a lone ngalati was a group of four, standing head to head in earnest consultation. The grass rippled where invisible babies moved; two of them appeared in a flattened clearing and began to play, butting at each other, squealing happily.

"Look!" Beyond the pointing black finger I saw the solitary animal under a spreading tree; he was busily plucking trunkfuls of grass and cramming them into his mouth.

"Not the very big one, but you try him?" I nodded, striving to be calm and nonchalant. He did his trick with the pinch of dust and the grains fell at a slight angle, caught by a breeze I could not feel.

"You have other bullets?"

"Yes." Two in the rifle, two in my belt, two more in my jacket pocket. If I had to fire all those—well, I should not be in a position to need more; I should be jelly.

"Come!" He went fast, almost at a run, round to the left in a wide flanking movement. 'Between the ear and the eye, between . . .' Old Shikulu came steaming up to the front trying to take the lead; Kalaka motioned him back angrily. Too many cooks? Or, two heads better . . .? Or the Bemba saying: 'When too many cocks crow, the dawn does not come'? The old fellow wanted to share any glory that was going and kept beside me, holding his little axe ready for the kill, his rheumy old eyes aglow with hunter's lust. We threaded our way along buffalo paths in the grass, seeing nothing but the sky until we reached a vantage point among bushes on a convenient ant-hill.

The elephant stood three-quarters facing us, quite motionless; the range looked to be close on eighty yards and I could only just make out the vague position of his eye. The brain target seemed terribly small at that distance.

"Shoulder, *mkwai*," whispered Kalaka. Behind me I could hear the heavy breathing of the old man. I got into an adequate position sitting down, slowly brought up the cannon, took a deep breath and fired. The slam of the shot was like a thunder-clap in the silence of the valley. For an instant he stood stock-still, then turned and made off, ears waving and great feet thudding on the hard ground. I leapt to my feet and fired again, hearing the solid strike of the bullet, but he did not pause. Kalaka was

pumping shots from his .303, Old Shikulu was yelling at the very top of his voice.

Quite suddenly the huge, galloping shape stopped in its tracks and slowly fell over. We ran to where he lay still struggling to get up. I went to the head.

"No, not yet!" Kalaka's voice was urgent. Men had been killed before now by the dying swipe of a trunk. I fired a third bullet into the back of his massive head and with a sad moaning sigh he died. I'll never forget the sound of his dying, and because of it I will never shoot an elephant again. Never. Not if he carried two hundred pounds of ivory in each tusk.

But I was too excited to be affected by anything but the triumph of the moment. Old Shikulu danced up and down and shook me by the hand; the other carriers climbed on to the body, talking nineteen to the dozen.

He was an elderly bull; the tusks were not big, the ivory badly stained, but perhaps large enough to pay the costs of the trip. The ears were holed and ragged at the edges, very likely caused by projectiles fired from native weapons, home-made muzzle-loaders flinging bits of iron with random inaccuracy. The white man at least kills fairly cleanly.

I sat on the barrel body and spread soaking clothes to dry on the scarred, wrinkled hide. Vultures appeared, wheeling across the burning sky, sure of a meal. Now there would be meat for all at Shiwa, and for that the boys kept thanking me.

They cut off his tail with the stiff black hairs used in the making of bracelets; they grouped themselves on the elephant to be photographed. Then we left the dead hulk and went back to camp, plunging into the river in clothes only just dry.

If I should seem to have used too many pages on this account of shooting an unfortunate elephant, I—to use

a well-worn expression—crave your indulgence; one does not hunt elephant every day of one's life. At least, I don't.

He was there the next morning, untouched by bird or beast and grossly swollen. Even the eyes were still intact, small and wise in death, buried deep within a mass of leathery wrinkles. At once the little axes got busy, marking the tough hide into segments and strips, carefully planned. Soon the body was naked and white, the smell sickly and pungent and, whenever an axe bit too deep, quite disgusting, as the gases escaped with a shrill, revolting hiss. They laughed at that, the butchers, thinking it a great joke to see me turn my head away.

Reeking hunks of meat were stripped from the massive bones; the workers plunged inside, wading to their knees in blood, their bodies slippery and streaming red, throughout the sweltering day. Unable to endure the sight, I went down to the river and sat in the shallows while swallows darted close and a large iguana lizard appeared on a rock to watch me with cold unblinking eyes. Far away I heard the trumpeting of elephants. Wood doves called and the most gorgeous of butterflies hovered above the sluggish water.

By evening nothing remained but the mangled skeleton; the boys were relaxing round a fire spitting blackened gobbets of flesh, turning them in the ashes; Stanley was erecting a rough zariba at the foot of a gnarled tree. The grass shone golden at the end of that long exciting day, golden and trembling in the wind that came to cool the scorched land; I wandered out of the smell and sat to watch the first sunset I had seen clearly in the bush. I sat there as the sun crouched on the flat tops of the trees, as it dropped out of sight, setting the skyline aflame, and as the inferno turned slowly to a deep and radiant amethyst shot with rays of blue and orange. The dusty greens and yellows of the bush waned to grey and then to a darkness, soft and rich as velvet, which settled silently over the vast

mysterious wilderness, bringing with it the chill of night.

The fire glowed, a red and alien eye, and round the leaping flames were silhouetted the blanketed shapes of the carriers. It was as though they grew from the ground, they were part of this savage land, they belonged. And I? I was there as a stranger, a stranger fascinated, enthralled and yet perhaps a little afraid, for all his guns and camera and superior knowledge. For here I knew nothing. This was something so very different.

From where I lay under my net I could see some of their faces, the glint of teeth and eyes in the firelight; I heard the loud laughter, the voices now raised, now lowered in sinister whispering; sometimes the heads would turn towards me as they muttered and murmured. What were they saying, squatting there in a circle, bloodstained skins glistening in the flare of the flames, tearing at the elephant meat?

In the cold melancholy small hours they sang; part-songs of a strange haunting rhythm, monotonous and hypnotic as the drums. And in the silences I heard the hideous yelps and whimpers of the hyenas round the skeleton. Mist rolled from the river, creeping to the outskirts of the firelight to hang dank and writhing at the edge of darkness.

The walking had set off the trouble in my leg and when I slept it was the sleep of fever, alive with nightmare fancies; I thought the other elephants would come back, as had been known, to trample the slayers of their fellow; I kept sitting up violently pouring with sweat, certain I had heard the thunder of the charging herd, the shrill squeals of revenge. And all night, in and out of my nightmare, were the singing and the blaze of the fire and the terrible sound of the hyenas.

I did not feel proud of having shot the elephant; the great beast had looked very splendid standing under his tree, at peace in his home, doing no harm and wonderfully free; free to walk where he would, through the length

and breadth of the long secluded valleys, to climb the grey hills and stand to browse in the shade of his favourite trees, to wallow in the brown mud along the shores of untroubled rivers, to roll and trumpet and squirt brown water over his rough scarred back, to tread the iron paths of Africa, of *his* land. Sometimes giving battle, sometimes scenting man, but not so very often. Leading his own untroubled, unhindered existence in the sun and in the rains, while the years roll slowly by, until one day the peace of his valley is blasted by the roar of a large and efficient rifle and he, mortally wounded, runs blindly and uncomprehending till he falls, and lies helpless, struggling feebly to get up, not even having caught so much as a glimpse of his enemy.

He lies on the hot hard ground of his valley as the life dribbles out of his stricken old body; he groans and sighs and does not understand why he is suddenly helpless.

Then he dies, and his killers stand round him in triumph. I said I would never kill another elephant, and that is true. Yet I know that, if I had the moment to live over again, the moment when the sight of the rifle was steady on his shoulder, then I would certainly squeeze the trigger. And for that I have no answer. No more answer than the man who would go out of his way to succour an injured sparrow and yet shoot down scores of pheasants, enjoying every second of it.

We are surely more illogical in our attitude to killing and cruelty than to anything else.

I set out for home just after dawn, washed-out, feeble and shivering in the morning mists which clung to the tips of the tall grass and swirled above the cold, brown river. With me went Stanley and George. George was the assistant hunter, a thin, wiry lad of amazing toughness. We walked three miles to the bicycles, sodden from wading. Stanley was hung with pots and pans; George carried my

great bulging valise on his head. For short distances I took a turn, till my heart revolted and the morning swam crazily among blurry trees. We rested, slowly drying in the mounting heat; the Africans rolled my pipe tobacco in large green leaves and smoked, well content. Then once more we hoisted up that awful valise and staggered on and up, up the steep rocky wall to where the bicycles had been hidden under piles of branches. Again we rested but not for long; forty miles lay between our longing bodies and Shiwa.

The day dragged slowly by in a nightmare of exhaustion and semi-fever. Sometimes we rode at breakneck speed; sometimes we pushed our machines up perpendicular little hills. Once we lost ourselves and blundered about in a secluded swamp; the wheels stuck as though in glue, our feet squelched and sucked and every step had become a dragging effort. My strength had been drained by the heat of the previous days and I went forward automatically, not taking in what went on round me. Left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot, every step cutting a fraction of distance off that terrible forty miles. On to the saddle and wobble along, cotton wool in my skull, the remnants of the fever pounding in my ears.

The sun climbed into the sky pouring heat on to our heads and shoulders like the molten ore spilling from the vats in the smelting sheds. I fell farther and farther behind; Stanley and George had longer and longer waits in which to rest, then, as soon as I had caught up, off they went again. Swearing weakly and shaking the sweat from my stinging eyes, I pedalled after their vanishing figures, determined not to collapse, kept going by a quite ridiculous pride which whispered urgently: 'I'll show them'. But I knew I should not be able to show them for much longer. Once in the Malayan jungle, the world had suddenly gone black on me and ignominiously I had passed out with heat-exhaustion. Very unpleasant it was, too. I longed to pitch off my bicycle into the shade of a thick tree and lie

there quietly dying. I longed to shout, to croak: 'I can go no farther. We must stop here and make camp. Stop, you damned savages who can go on for ever, who do not seem to feel fatigue nor heat. Stop, stop—stop!'

At one hill two little girls ran to help me with my bicycle and pushed it to the village at the top, where I found a sea of kind, black faces, a tree stump on which to rest. *Mwapoleni, mkwai. Mwapoleni, mwapoleni.* I tried to smile back. They clapped their hands and the children pressed closer to inspect this strange, half-dead object with the funny-coloured skin and eyes. Stanley pointed at the sun, then ahead, saying: "Time go." Children ran beside me for quite some way beyond the village, the patter of their little feet like rain on the hard earth.

There were many villages and we stopped in them all. In each I was introduced to the headman; in each the villagers brought me gifts; sweet potatoes, peanuts rolling on a broad leaf, on one occasion a solitary enormous carrot torn from some meagre garden for the white man who possessed a hundred times more than they could ever hope to have. They brought the little gifts with smiles and murmured greetings and a wonderful generosity. I felt humbled and very deeply touched, and disgusted with myself that I could only communicate my thanks through Stanley.

I remember a headman, a tall old man of magnificent dignity dressed in a long black overcoat, on whose grey, tight curls sat a brand-new crimson fez; his wife had the face of an aristocrat, fine-boned and infinitely wise. I remember that he pressed me to sit in his patched deck-chair. I think I must have fallen asleep, rudely and boorishly, and I could not even apologise for my lack of manners.

I remember going on, feeling a bitter revulsion against my miserable body that was letting me down so badly, and thinking what a useless lump of flesh it was.

It was on this next stretch that I ran into the tree and that was almost too much; I might easily have wept

hysterically, beating with clenched fists at the soil of Africa, drumming with petulant feet, squealing 'I can't go on'. But I didn't. I merely lay, my bleeding nose cushioned on a branch, thankful to be in a prone position till George came back to help me to my feet.

Slowly the sun slanted towards the end of a pretty dreadful day as we bumped and squeaked out of the valley. The miles fell behind us and I now felt I could go on for ever or even longer. My body and soul were entirely separate. The body was doing the work, shamed into it by my previous thoughts, mechanically, in the way of an engine without water or oil, grinding, steaming and clattering, while the soul bowed slowly along above.

It happened to me once in the war, that curious experience of getting outside my body and watching it twitching and gasping below. I expect the Eastern races have some complicated explanation for the phenomenon, but I think it very likely that my soul was simply bored with that infernal bicycle. We progressed like that for quite some way and very peaceful it was. We rejoined each other again and became one entity at the next village. The fever had cooled down to an ordinary headache and a bad taste in the mouth; the shadows were longer, the heat not so cruel. I recognised the village and knew we had not more than about ten miles still to go.

Those last miles up to the ridge, where the Great North Road ran, led steeply upward and often we had to walk, but now I stepped out jauntily, keeping up with the others, who at last were showing signs of wear. My soul's little holiday had done every part of me a power of good. Soon, for the first time since we had waded the river eleven hours before, I was in the lead.

We reached the Shiwa signpost. The rest of the way led downhill and we tore along skidding perilously in the soft, red dust; George sang; Stanley sang; I sang, as we made it a race. For we were almost home, the sun was low, the evening cool and fragrant.

But on the corner where the lake comes into view I stopped, leaving the others to career out of sight. For now at this hour Shiwa Ngandu was indeed the Lake of the Sunset. I sat by the side of the darkening road and watched until the last brazen spark had died from the black surface of the water, until the valley had lost every last drop of colour and the lake showed only as dim and tarnished steel; then I rode on between the flat, black trees, past the necklace of fires beside the little brick houses, into the deep, dark, beautiful glade where the lights of Shiwa shone softly through the night.

That evening we had champagne. A festive mood held sway at Shiwa, for was there not to be meat for all? The smell of all that food wafted forty miles from the bank of the brown river where the hyenas squabbled over the skeleton, and scores of mouths watered in anticipation. *Nsofu!* The magical word scampered through the trees and along the lake from hut to hut. *Nsofu!* Meat and yet more meat!

"I think," said S., "that it would be best if you go over to the D.C. in the morning and tell him what's happened. Better his getting it from you than hearing it tenth-hand from one of his Boma police."

"I expect he'll count it as my yearly elephant," said John.

"If things are as they used to be in the old days, he'll read you out a few pages of game laws, then take your cheque for the elephant-licence and tell you to be more careful in future. Then he will probably come over here and see me about it and we'll have to ask the fellow to lunch." S. raised his glass.

"To your first elephant!"

"I wonder what he's like," said Lorna thoughtfully. "The new D.C."

"They say a real terror where ivory-poaching's concerned," laughed John. We all laughed and drank down our champagne.

THE Union Jack hung colourful but lifeless in the sun at the top of a tall white pole outside the Boma Offices. Boma messengers lounged on the veranda, smart in their red and blue tunics. A polished brass sign led me to the District Commissioner. His room was white and cool, full of men in sports jackets and shorts, smoking pipes.

"Well, I'm sorry I can't help that," said the man behind the desk. "My decision is final."

"Right you are, sir." They all clumped out raising their eyebrows at each other. I stood about in a corner.

"Yes?" said the Great Man. "What can I do for you?" His features were pale and saturnine but well-carved, and a thin, black, Tartar moustache drooped above his tight mouth.

This somehow did not look like a District Commissioner, a man responsible for law and order over thousands of square miles. Surely he should have been more bronzed than most, that much leaner, harder. And where was his faded bush jacket: no wide-brimmed hat hung on the wall; only a new and shiny Panama. He sat behind a mountain of paper. So S. had been right. The modern Colonial Administrator has no time for going out into the bush, for visiting the villages, seeing for himself; for now like most of the world he is hamstrung by paper and riveted to the seat of his office chair.

"I-er-I'm staying at Shiwa."

"Indeed. And how is Sir Stewart?" His long fingers were forming the lawyer's eternal triangle.

"Very well." He made the tiniest possible gesture of impatience.

"What exactly was it you wanted to see me about?" Here we go. Let's get it over.

"I'm afraid I seem to have shot . . . to have shot an elephant."

There, it was out. Not quite as planned, but out. The

ball was now his. For fully ten seconds he said nothing, made no sound; then his light-brown eyes began to pop, his mouth opened and shut but still no words came until at last, rather muffled: "You *seem* to have done *what*?"

"Shot an elephant." I thought he would never get his eyes back into his head.

"An *elephant*!" His pale face was suddenly suffused and his speech was strangled as though he dangled at the end of an invisible halter. He half rose in his chair and I backed away fearing he aimed to do me a mischief.

"Oh, my God!" he exclaimed, dropping his head into his hands, clutching at his wiry, greying hair. "Oh, my God!" Poor fellow, how he was suffering! He shouted between his fingers and a little man pattered in wearing baggy pinstripe trousers.

"Yes?" The D.C. pulled himself sufficiently to point at me and gasp out: "Do you know what he's done?"

"No idea, sir." He looked at me with lively interest.

"He comes in here, in here, mark you, and has the infernal lip to tell *me*, the District Commissioner, that he's shot an elephant."

"Oh, jolly good show!" began the little man, obviously in error without thinking, then swiftly altered his reaction, magically adopting his the-devil-he-has expression.

"Oh, I say, sir, good lord, has he?" We waited the next development.

"Look here," said the D.C., "I suppose you know what you've done is an extremely serious offence, very serious indeed."

"That's why I came straight along to tell you myself." Man-to-man frankness, that's what's best. "I realise I should have taken out a special licence"

"I certainly shouldn't have issued you with an elephant licence," he snapped.

"Oh!"

"My God, this is a hell of a position to be in!" The District Officer, he of the pinstripe trousers, bustled back

with a large ledger. His superior asked him if they had issued me with an ordinary Game Licence.

"Yes, sir. Last week. Twenty pounds paid. It's all in the file."

"Did you not take the trouble to find out what you could or could not shoot on that licence?" His voice cut like a whip.

Now that was a tricky one. I had not actually seen the licence for, though I had sent the cheque, the licence had not arrived before we went out. Grab the nettle, I thought. But the D.O. came to the rescue in a most noble and unexpected fashion.

"Regrettably, sir, the licence does not appear to have left the office. Owing to some hitch in the . . ."

"So in fact what you are trying to say is that he had no licence in his possession at all?"

"Well, if you put it like that, sir . . ."

"I do put it like that."

"Well, no, sir."

"I sec." It was crystal-clear I had been a bad, bad boy. Silence but for the flip of turning pages and the unmusical sound of one African calling to another.

"This is damnable!" growled the D.C.

"Yes, sir." His subordinate flipped his way through the large book. I allowed my attention to wander to a picture of the Queen. She looked so regal and sympathetic; I wondered what she would have thought of this situation.

"Ah, here we are . . . Game Laws of Northern Rhodesia . . . mumble, mumble . . . as amended in 1927 . . . mumble mumble . . . hm . . . see page 1423 para 16 . . . mumble . . . as further amended in . . . mumble . . . sub. para 18b . . . mm, hm . . . refer back to volume one. That's odd, I could have sworn . . ."

"For God's sake!" shouted the D.C. "Stop that blasted mumbling."

"Sorry, sir."

"I must *think*." A beefy man strode in. "How's tricks,

Don?" The D.O. shook his head frantically, finger to lips.

"Busy, eh? Right, I'll nip up to the house and take a beer off the Mem." He suddenly noticed me.

"Didn't we meet at the Show? Thought so. You're at Shiwa, aren't you? Thought so. Been getting any shooting?" The D.O. gave an excellent imitation of a man sitting astride a time bomb, his features all screwed up. For my part I looked to the Queen for succour. The D.C. pushed back his chair with the sudden rasp of ill-temper.

"It's damned awkward, that's what it is, *damned* awkward. For everyone concerned. It's nearly as awkward for me as it is for you. You see that, don't you? And what about Sir Stewart, what's he think about this business?"

"He is very upset," I said, fingers crossed behind my back.

"I should damn well think he was " He began to pace the room, smacking at his open palm with a small stick. On his feet he was a big man. I tried my only card.

"I suppose I couldn't—er—pay the cost of an elephant-licence?" His assistant brightened. Perhaps they urgently needed the money.

"That would certainly be quite a solution, sir." I think his career in the Colonial Service came perilously close to the rocks at that moment. Being well brought up, I closed my ears to what followed.

By the end of a sticky half-hour of pacing and counter-pacing the D.C. still had not made up his mind. No news is supposed to be good news; my spirits rose a point. He kept on muttering aloud. "By God, this is a tricky case!" and swiping at his hand with the stick. At length he slumped into his chair undecided.

"I do not think you acted with criminal intent so I am prepared to view this matter with more leniency. If I thought for one moment that you had shot this elephant with the intention of selling the ivory feloniously, then I should have inflicted the very maximum punishment. Is this understood?" I nodded humbly.

"But I need further time to consider the matter." He

picked up a pen and pretended to be busy. "That's all then." I was dismissed.

"Don't worry," encouraged the kindly D.O. as he saw me off, "I expect he'll make you sweat for a day or two then he'll take your money for a special licence, and that'll be that."

Next morning the District Commissioner arrived at Shiwa with the sunrise, accompanied by two large Boma policemen. From my window I looked out and heard in my mind's ear the click of handcuffs. I was summoned to the hall where I found the D.C. standing, swarthy and forbidding, in a pool of sunlight; S. gazed stolidly out of the door, the atmosphere was tense.

"I've been thinking over your case, Carnegie, and on second thoughts I have decided to charge you formally." He paused to let the dread words sink in. "I consider your case one of the worst I have come across, the very worst, and . . . well, in fact you'll have to come up for trial, that's all there is to it." He was breathing heavily. The silence was tenser; S. turned to snort angrily.

"No, I cannot possibly let you get away with it. My conscience would not allow it for one thing, and for another I'd be . . . well, I'd be condoning a crime."

S. made a sound which could have been a cough or could equally well have been the word 'Bah'.

"Should you plead Guilty, then I can try you now, without any fuss or bother, but if you plead Not Guilty, then of course the trial will have to be in court and you may produce witnesses for your defence. Is that clear?"

"Yes, thank you. I'll plead guilty. After all I shot the thing and it's dead, so what else can I plead?"

"Right, we can get on with it. Now, Sir Stewart, I would be obliged if you could find us a room where we shall be undisturbed." S. snorted again; I could see he was very angry indeed.

The Court sat in the little office by the post-office. I entered, braced by a smile of sympathy and encouragement from Mister Mushroom. It was a very small room and exceedingly hot. The Majesty of the Law removed its jacket and patted at its moist neck with a khaki handkerchief.

"Sit down." On what? Air? I borrowed a chair from next door.

"It is the elephant?" asked Paul.

"It is the elephant." He shook his head sadly.

I sat down on the edge of the chair and listened to the long rigmarole of the charge . . . that on such and such a date, you etc. etc. . . . did shoot and kill one elephant contrary to the Game Laws . . . as amended in 1873 . . . He droned on. A little black face squashed its nose against the window pane, intrigued as a child that peers at glittering things in a shop window.

"Go away!" shouted the D.C. "Go on, clear out!" He concluded in a shower of Chibemba. The child withdrew. The trial proceeded.

"Under the powers conferred upon me by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth . . ." As though she had ever heard of the man!

He drew yet another important sheet of foolscap towards him and wrote busily, but, try as he might, he simply could not get the sentence down to his satisfaction. I noticed with alarm that he was rapidly losing his temper. The child had merely vanished to collect friends; half a dozen faces flattened themselves on to the glass. His pen sputtered and sprayed ink over the virgin paper; the scrunch of foolscap was loud and irritable; I stared at the ceiling. One hates to see dignity cracking.

"Tell those bloody children to get out of it!" The prisoner left the dock to clear the unruly crowd. One of the crowd winked before scuttling off; the prisoner winked back.

"Under the powers . . ." He was off again. Flies chased each other in the corners, buzzing happily, and

the heat increased with every minute. The combined judge, jury and hangman fidgeted in his chair; with any sort of luck there might be ants in his shorts.

"Now, I want you to tell me in your own words"—that's an asinine remark if ever there was one, a man is not a ventriloquist's dummy after all—"exactly what happened from the moment you went out on safari till you shot the elephant. Slowly, please, as I have to take it down."

"Well, it all happened as I told you yesterday."

"This is no longer yesterday," he retorted sharply. "Don't you understand I haven't heard your story, I don't know a thing about it." I gawped at him. Could it be that the Law really was an Ass? He waited with pen poised for the confession. All right, I said to myself, you want the story, then you'll have it, every last detail. Half an hour later he was still writing and fat drops of perspiration were falling, plump, on to the ink. Wearily he dragged fresh paper from the diminishing pile. Such lovely grand paper all covered in lions and crowns and things.

". . . so I raised the rifle and pressed the trigger . . ." I took him through the whole scene right to the moment of truth when the elephant fell and I became a criminal to vie with Crippen and Landru. "I think that's about all."

He shot me a dirty look, dislodging a drop that had clung stubbornly to the tip of his nose so that it fell to form another blot among his fine, flowing letters.

"I will read it out to you and then you will sign it." He spoke in the curious flat tone of one whose tether is fast approaching its end. I listened now and then; what a truly fascinating tale it was! Then I signed and sat back. The D.C. sat back. Silence but for the noise of agitated flies and formless Bantu cries from without. Soon the silence grew embarrassing; I wondered if I should ring for cocoa and biscuits.

"I suppose you realise you have committed a very serious crime indeed." I hung my head in the accepted way of evildoers.

"I could send you to prison for six months; I suppose you realise that?" I nodded. Jail for six months. An interesting experience, plenty of time to write, to meditate, and to reflect upon life's knotty little problems.

"Or fine you two hundred pounds? Or both?" He was enjoying himself more, he felt the sudden surge of Power with a capital P.

"Have you anything further to say in mitigation before Court passes sentence?" I remembered the word mitigation from Army courts-martial and remembered it as meaning something vaguely hopeful for the accused.

"Only that I thought my game licence covered everything "

"Look here," he said forcefully, "we can't have every Tom, Dick and Harry coming out here and not taking the trouble to even read what's written on their licences." He was working himself into a lather of righteous anger. I withdrew into myself 'Coming out here, thinking they own the bloody place, murdering elephants right, left and centre without a by-your-leave, and then saying they thought everything was all right Well, everything is not all right, understand?" Yes, I understood I could hardly fail to He was fairly roaring by now and the terrified flies buzzed frantically in the sudden, mounting rush of hot air

If I had killed my grandmother with rat poison, I could not have felt more despicable, if I had pushed my children under a bus, I would not have been more ashamed. I was just a thoughtless, cruel beast At last he burnt himself out, paused and then said. "Court will now consider sentence "

I stole a look at my watch Nearly lunchtime and I wanted to get out after the leopard Come on, man, don't hang about.

"I am prepared to accept your plea of ignorance on this occasion and therefore take a more lenient view of what otherwise I should be forced to treat as a really shocking

case . . ." A lorry drew up outside, revving its engine so that I could not hear his words which was a pity, for I am sure they were both well-chosen and to the point.

The lorry shot out of sight in a cloud of billowing dust and through the gradually diminishing racket I caught the last sentences of the summing up and the punishment: "Your action was, though stupid, not intentionally criminal and therefore I am prepared to accept your plea in mitigation. Under the powers conferred . . ."—dear God, not again!—" . . . the court finds you guilty of the said crime and"—the last words tumbled out in a rush—"fines you the sum of twenty pounds." He leant back with a heart-felt sigh. "Phew, thank heaven that's over!"

He had been remarkably lenient. The fine was, in fact, five pounds less than the cost of an elephant licence.

"Thank you," I said. But there was a sting in the tail, for on the way to the house he suddenly mentioned the fact that of course the Government would have to confiscate the ivory. "But you can keep the meat. It's probably rotten by now, anyway." We parted on terms, if not exactly bosom, at least fairly cordial.

"Tonight we'll have some more champagne," said S.

A week later the meat came in. It could by then have made the journey unassisted, but in fact arrived in wicker baskets, black and stinking, borne on the heads of women. The tusks were not large, now that I saw them cut free of the skull. The Bemba say that the man who pulls out the tusks becomes impotent and so they get the oldest man of the party to perform this risky business. Old Shikulu still looked remarkably virile.

Looking at the stained ivory, I thought the rumpus would have been harder to bear if the tusks had tipped the scales at over a hundred pounds each. A crowd gathered to feast its eyes on all that meat and to rejoice. The Bemba are a race of hunters and Mulanga, their god of hunting, had smiled where the mad white laws had frowned. So there was much excitement and clapping.

"It is indeed a shame", said Paul sympathetically, "to see them go to the government." He sighed deeply.

Stanley came to say good-bye; Stanley in a smart suit but still wearing his red corduroy cap; Stanley suddenly seized with the urge to travel; Stanley off to the Copper Belt where the money was good and a bright lad would surely make his fortune. I had a brief, sad vision of the red cap blackened with smuts and smelting dust; of the man who had danced on the dead elephant in the hot sunlight, bent double in the reeking darkness of a mine.

"Good luck, Stanley!"

That is how it is. The race of hunters is melting away, the men drifting towards the lure of the copper and leaving the women and children to till the soil and hack an uncertain living from the hard, unpredictable earth. That is how it is, and to me it seems very sad.

[13]

THE few remaining days at Shiwa fled relentlessly away; try to put drag chains on happiness and the faster the golden hours spin by. I went after the leopard two or three times and one day felt I was very close, but though he may have been watching me I never saw even the flick of a tail.

One early morning I drove out to a distant corner of the estate with Paul in the hopes of finding a bushbuck. We waited in the jeep till the sun was clearing the hills and then took to the bush, skirting a *dumbo* heavy with mist, then following the bank of a broad river. We found the beds of half a dozen bushbuck arranged neatly round a tree and still warm; we found the spoor of one of the large antelope, roan or sable, and close behind it the marks of a lion. Pau. loaded his old shotgun with S.S.G. and we stepped more carefully, entering thick grass. I had the

sneaking craven wish to be safely abed, mixed up with the longing to come upon the lion crouched over its newly killed prey. I supposed I required a special licence. If it charged I should have to shout: "Yours, Paul!" For this time it would quite certainly be prison.

We lost the spoor by a stream into which I waded confidently only to sink like a stone in mud and slimy, tendril weeds and from which I had to be extracted like a cork. On the other side open grassland stretched into the far distance, sparsely dotted with small trees and busy-topped ant-hills. I steamed in the heat, and within ten minutes was dry.

"Very good for antelope this country," said Paul. "See them a long way." A honey-bird chattered shrewishly, keeping level with us till we were out of its territory.

On the way back we stopped at the hot springs. The water was amazingly clear over rocks and gravelly sand; soda-water bubbles rose through the sand and the temperature was very warm, almost hot. I stripped off my mud-packed clothes and rolled in the water; a most soothing sensation it was, marred only by the attentions of the big, grey hippo-flies whose stings are like blunt needles.

We drove to Kasama for another agricultural show and dance. Kasama is bigger and grander than Chinsali for a Provincial Commissioner holds court there, controlling with the merest flick of his fly whisk the lives and fortunes of a very large number of Africans. The distance to Kasama was a hundred and twenty miles and on the way we crossed the slow, shining flood of the Chambuzi, going over on a flat pontoon drawn by chanting natives pulling on wet, rattling chains. A field gun stood beneath a bushy tree marking the spot where Von Lettow, that wily German commander, met with the British in 1918 to discuss an armistice. Farther on, a spindly old man carried out tsetse-control with the aid of a little butterfly net and a leaky flit-gun.

The Boma area was most impressive and strewn with

genuine Colonial administrators in shorts and wide-brimmed hats, men who looked the part. No pinstripe trousers at Kasama. An old black lunatic gibbering in handcuffs and long black overcoat stood in the sun guarded by tall *askaris*, waiting to meet the law.

One of the District Officers very kindly put me up in his bungalow; his mother had spent her life in India. "I sometimes wonder," she said, "if we're silly to spend our lives in these places where we're really quite out of place."

The other D.O. gave us dinner, he and his dark and charming wife. "Tomorrow's going to be a shambles. I'm in command of the greasy pole and there's always a broken leg. What's more, Chitimukulu's bound to be tight." He emphasised his words with a human jaw-bone, waving it like a conductor's baton. "Found it on my table this morning; no one seems to know where the devil it came from."

The Kasama Show was much like the Chinsali Show, but on a larger scale. All the dignitaries sat beneath a grass awning with their wives in smart, summery hats above set, smiling faces. Loudspeakers relayed a succession of harsh, scratchy tunes popular some years ago; now and again the music stopped to allow speeches.

"Paramount Chiefs, Chiefs, Provincial Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen . . . today is the birthday of Her Majesty . . . auspicious occasion . . . her peoples throughout the Commonwealth . . . brought together . . . one family . . ." The spectators craned, laughing and chattering, to stare at the set, smiling faces beneath the summery hats.

". . . a day for rejoicing . . ." Hurray, hurray! The flash of white teeth and the bunting standing out strongly in the hot breeze. Chitimukulu, the Paramount Chief, took his place at the microphone. Again I felt cheated, for here was a figure clothed in European clothes—a brown paper suit and open-necked tartan shirt. He spoke uncertainly, puffing frequently into the microphone so that his words came out as through a long wind-tunnel.

Two Edwardian characters in long, blue jackets and tight Teddy-trousers raised their speckled boaters at intervals throughout the long speech. The crowd stirred restively but remained silent and respectful, giving vent occasionally to a long drawn 'Eeh!'

A gorgeous figure took his place, flamboyant in robes of many hues and with a squashed turban crammed on his head and a great staff in his hand. This was stronger stuff, indeed; he fairly tore into that microphone and the clash of his large gleaming teeth resounded over the arena. The crowd gave him a big hand. Then the gramophones gave us 'Night and Day' and we resumed our steady circuit of the stalls, perspiring freely.

John and I went to bathe at the Club pool. The only other bather was the Provincial Commissioner sunning himself and getting away from the crowds. Very wisely he had left Mrs P.C. to hand out the prizes.

There was a sundowner party at someone's bungalow and there I met a man who had been a sergeant in my platoon fifteen years before. The other guests gave us a wide berth and left us to reminisce unmercifully. He had been captured in the Desert.

"Some of us ended up in Poland. They made us march a thousand miles in fifty days on rations that wouldn't have kept a crowd of mice going. But you know what kept us going? Discipline. All that stuff we used to curse on the square for a waste of time, that's what kept us on our feet. Not one of the Guardsmen fell out on that march. Sometimes these days it's a good thing to remember how those chaps stuck it out when a lot of others were packing up all over the place." We drank a flurry of toasts to the 'old days' and the space around us widened perceptibly. Perhaps fortunately, we left for the dance.

The clubhouse had been built and decorated and furnished by the members themselves. The band was provided by a gramophone off-stage. We sat at small round tables on small cane chairs; the room was hung with strings of

little flags, the flowers on the curtains were huge and gay; there were one or two white dinner-jackets but in the main the men were dressed, as always for having fun, in funereal black—a strange, gloomy custom.

“Well, what d’you think of our little effort in the middle of the bush?” asked a fat face with albino eyebrows. Its owner was a trader. “I’ve told ’em a thousand times there should be a trader’s representative on the P.C.’s staff. It’s us who know what’s going on, we’re in the bush more than anyone.” His face was surprisingly pale for one who lived in the bush. “I know the blacks and I’m telling you they’ll never amount to a damned thing on their own.”

“Ssh!” Everyone was on their feet.

“If there’s trouble brewing, who gets the first sniff of it? The traders of course. No, I tell you . . .”

“Ssh! SSH!” We struggled through the painful performance of “God Save the Queen” without the benefit of musical accompaniment.

The dancing then went forward with hardly a pause and the heat soon became stifling, one’s shirt fit for the wringer, the noise louder and louder till the gramophone was often completely inaudible, but still the dancing went on.

I strolled outside in the clear, cool starlight; the hubbub poured out into the night, the medley of civilised sounds, the brassy music, the sudden shrieks of loud laughter, the heavy shuffle of leather on wood, the occasional crash of breaking glass. A fire spat sparks into the sky as the Africans sitting round it threw wood on to the flames.

I went back to join a reel. All the Scots had collected themselves into a clannish little group at one end of the room and there was a certain amount of shouting.

“Clear the Sassenachs off the floor!” and, “Let’s have some proper dancing.” This sort of thing can, I think, be overdone, bringing little credit to Scotland’s fair name. No one likes to remember Bannockburn more than I, no one feels more grief at the thought of Flodden, nor more anger at the often smug and superior attitude adopted by

our southern neighbours, but there are limits. The Scots are a great people, and a great people surely do not have to shout about their greatness quite so loudly.

However, an end to digression and on with the dance. We carried out the enjoyable manoeuvres of our reel to the strains of some well-worn regimental marches, but it did not matter. The English stood huddled by the bar, scornful and resentful of these leaping simpletons. By now, dinner-jackets were off, braces were on view and shirts stained with great ugly patches of heat. The club waiters on the other hand enjoyed our confused gyrations, grinning and stamping their bare feet. Towards dawn the party broke up.

The journey home next day is best forgotten.

Long, long ago, before the coming of the white man, there were many villages scattered along the shores of the lake; there were also many hippos and crocodiles which caused much damage to the gardens and crops of the inhabitants. Councils of war were held and it was decided to sally forth on to the lake and wipe out the marauders. The story runs that some two hundred men took to the water in their canoes early one morning, watched by the women and the children and the old people.

All through a bloody and terrible day they fought the animals with spears and axes till the water frothed crimson and by the evening there remained two hippos, half a dozen crocodiles—and two men.

That was the end of the villages; the survivors moved away from the stricken waters leaving the banks to the puku, the situtunga—that amazing semi-aquatic antelope that swims like an expert and which to hide from its enemies will often lie submerged up to its eyes—and the countless varieties of birds.

John took me out in the evening to look for crocodile in the little boat with the outboard engine; he and I and a

boy, a rifle, a shot-gun and a spotlight. We found a pretty snake of emerald green curled in the spare-parts bag. If you are a snake in Africa, you sign your death-warrant on the day of your birth, for few stop to ask if you are harmless.

The boat chugged the length of the lake as the sun sank into the leopard hills and the cold of the evening forced us into jerseys. Herons and bitterns, storks and cranes, stood hunched in the reeds, white egrets strutted in the swampy grass, and diving ducks spread the silver ripples of their dives over the glassy water; tiny, blue kingfishers darted along the shore line, black and white ones swung on tough reeds, and an owl twisted slowly to avoid the attentions of weaver birds. Dwarf geese circled the boat, yellow-billed duck, white-faced duck, pochard, grebes, dabchicks and a pair of big spur-winged geese.

It was dark by the time we reached the far end of the lake and the mouth of the little winding river, the chorus of the frogs was deafening and droves of mosquitoes and gnats swarmed at our faces. We prepared for action, rigging the spotlight in the bows, loading the weapons, lashing hooks to long bamboo poles. A dead crocodile sinks almost at once and must be hauled to the boat in a matter of seconds.

"There's one old hippo down at this end. He's an irritable old basket and doesn't like being disturbed. If he comes for us, you'll have to shoot, but only if he's definitely going to attack." John explained how we would shut off the engine on spotting a crocodile—"You'll see the glow of its eyes in the light . . ."—and drift slowly and silently to within about six feet of the head.

"Get the forehead between the eyes and he's stone dead. The thing to watch out for is the tail, they can do a lot of damage with their tails." I slapped frantically at the insects, feeling them thick round my mouth and nostrils; when the spotlight was switched on I could see their clouds dancing almost solid all the way along the beam.

We rowed with gently squeaking oars between the

banks of tall reeds on gleaming black water; the boy handled the searchlight, swinging the beam from side to side, probing along the water-line turning the reeds to bleached walls. It was a narrow, corkscrew river with a dank and swampy smell and alive with those pestilential insects. We heard the irritable hippo snorting and splashing out of sight up a small side-stream but no awful face came steaming into sig'ht. After a while the insects became too bad; we were blinded and driven to near madness so we turned about, started the engine and made for the open water.

Slowly we cruised close to the shore, the beam sweeping the edge and among the little patches of rushes. I thought of John's description and searched the white water, for the glow of rear lights. Twice I saw what I took to be the eye of a crocodile, ruby-red with a fiery twinkle, but on approaching close we found nothing, no hideous snout still as a hunk of wood, no long, flat shape dark beneath the surface. Mist hung low over the water and on our left the crests of the leopard hills showed faintly in the sky and the lights of Shiwa glittered in the black mass of trees. It was very cold.

"Any luck?" asked Doctor R. on our return. A most intelligent, amusing woman anthropologist from Cambridge and quite unlike the popular conception of a professor. She had already written and published books on the history and customs of the Bemba people and now had returned to live among them again. She was getting together her camp bed and blankets, pots and pans, practising her Chibemba, preparing for some months in the bush.

"I really don't know what they'll think of me, I've forgotten practically all their language."

Her sentiments were strongly pro-African, sometimes almost to the point of bias. She did not see how we could go on keeping them in a state of ignorance and subservience.

"Fear is at the root of it, of course. Fear of competition, fear that the nigger straight from the trees might conceiv-

ably with education overtake the white man and steal his job."

"But surely we are educating the Africans?" I suggested.

"Yes, we are. But do we then give them jobs worthy of that education? Oh, no. Take the mines. A native can rise so far and no farther, whatever his talents. Instead we say, 'Work for us for ten, fifteen, twenty years and then go back to your village, forget what we've taught you, return to the trees.' But how can they, when they've had a taste of civilisation, of electricity, of plugs that pull and gents' natty suitings? In Kenya they'll blind you with propaganda," she used to tell me. "You'll get it morning, noon and night."

"Who are *they*?"

"The settlers."

One of her bugbears was the lack of protein in the native food. "The nutrition of the African population is at a dangerously low level and they don't get anything like enough protein. You've only to see the children to realise that. Listless and quiet when they ought to be tearing about all day long." In her view not enough of the bush was suitable for the making of gardens, most of the men were away on the Copper Belt.

"And besides they're not allowed to kill game, or rather it's very difficult for them to do so without being had up and charged with poaching. Where else can they get their meat? I ask you, where?"

But on the crocodile evening she was relaxed and unpolitical and performed her daring parlour trick of stripping off her stockings and lighting a match with her toes.

On the last evening I sat by the window before going to bed, trying not to notice the bulging suitcases already packed, trying to pretend it was the first evening and that a halcyon month still lay ahead. Kasakolo, the fat black cat with white bib, came as usual, as he had done nearly every evening, to sit beside me as I tried to write, washing his shirt front or walking over the paper,

advising and purring with the sound of a little rusty motor. Outside all was the same: the frogs, the night birds, the rustling in the flame tree, the scent of the eucalyptus, the thud of the electric light engine, the black cypresses and the cold glittering heavens.

In the hills the leopards would be lying in wait for the mice and beetles, and from the top of Nachipala the Lake of Shiwa would gleam and the eyes of the crocodiles would be glowing like red-hot coals. The irritable old hippo would be grunting and snorting, and away at the borders of the Loangwa Valley the elephants would be on the move, the lions would be following the buffalo herds, and the eerie cry of the hyena would be echoing in the misty valleys.

It would all be the same, and tomorrow I had to leave; I had to catch a bus which would certainly be noisy, probably smelly, and about as romantic as a cold in the head.

[14]

CERTAIN of the long-distance buses have compartments for the sole use of superior-class passengers. You pay more and sit in an extremely small box behind the driver's cab very full of luggage and dust. Between the superior-class folk and the black travellers there is a partition with little windows through which each half can see how the other one travels. The seats are not comfortable and the backs entirely upright. No harm in that for going from Chelsea to Piccadilly or even Carlisle to Aberdeen, but after a thousand miles this ramrod backrest becomes tedious, especially after a thousand miles of dirt roads.

I sat miserable and despondent, watching the lake slowly out of sight for the last time, not attempting to think of the future, remembering the send-off given me by Mister Mushroom and Paul and Yoram Jia; Doctor R. waving, calling out: "Don't forget, look me up in Cambridge

sometime." Cheers and waves, kind smiling faces; Kasaka very dignified, bowing courteously, and the deaf-mute gardener waving a red cloth, running beside the bus, lips moving silently. It was difficult to realise this was really the end and that I was on my way again into the unknown, into the hard unfeeling outside world. Twelve hundred miles to go and my only companion in the superior class a girl in a saucy white hat and large sunglasses who had said "hello, there!" in the accent of the New World.

At first I tried to pretend I was merely going away for the night, to Chinsali perhaps, to stay with the D.C., and that in the morning I should return to Shiwa, to my room with the view of the Lake; to more expeditions in the hills; to a wonderful carefree existence where for a visitor time meant absolutely nothing and every day was as perfect as the one before. But it was no good. I knew it was no good as the bus turned on to the main road and, shaking and rattling, began the long haul northwards towards Nairobi.

Stop at Tunduma, Mbeya, Iringa, Dodoma, Arusha—names on a map circled with red ink, a few inches between each. Today was Thursday. We should arrive on Tuesday. I began to wonder what lay behind the dark glasses. I glanced across the pile of suitcases at where she sat in the opposite window seat. She smiled nervously; the ice was cracked.

The driver seemed a merry ruffian and wore a broad grin on his flat face whenever it turned to see what was afoot. He had removed his uniform khaki jacket and drove in a maroon singlet, keeping his official cap crammed on the back of his tight woolly curls. Beside him sat the conductor and the spare driver; they all talked, shouting and laughing, mostly I think at our expense. On downward slopes our progress became rapid in the extreme, for the driver, as well as being merry, was a dashing fellow who loved to hurl his huge vehicle at the narrow little bridges at her very highest speed. After each bridge he would

turn to study our reactions, leaving the steering to Providence or, at times, the spare driver.

My fellow-passenger did not visibly bat an eyelid. It struck me that a girl who was prepared to travel alone in that sort of conveyance through Africa would not be likely to worry about excessive speed. I wondered how far she had come, how far she was going. At the Chinsali turning I discovered. We stopped for half an hour to eat and do such things as people do at halts. For her it was not easy; she had to walk some way into the bush before she found seclusion. Then, looking happier, she joined me and we munched at bullybeef sandwiches, sitting in the shade of a moulting jacaranda; the rest house provided fizzy lemonade, quite nasty.

Her name was Miss Howitt and she came from Honolulu. This was her first time away from home and she meant to see as much of the world as she possibly could. "I'm going to be married on my return, so this is the last real chance of genuine travel."

She was very serious and earnest. Already she had covered very many miles indeed, having come to Cape Town by sea, then by train to Broken Hill, where she had caught the bus at six that morning. But not a hair was out of place, every last strand tucked neatly away under the small hat.

"I never knew Africa was this big," she said.

"You could put America into it about four times and still have some spare space."

"Is that right?" The driver sounded the horn; in we piled and off we went. But not for long. Very soon a tyre burst. Out we bundled again. There were some quaint characters in the African section, the quaintest, we decided, being the man in the army greatcoat, green trousers, co-respondent shoes letting his toes out to breathe and a yellow duster tied as a head scarf round his face. On top he wore a spotless polo helmet several sizes too small.

"He's kinda cute," observed Miss Howitt seriously, pointing her camera.

"A moment please," he called. "A moment till I am ready." He removed his dark glasses, polished his teeth with his finger and stood leering. Miss Howitt did not smile. His friends clapped and laughed. The bus crew wrestled with the smouldering tyre.

At that stop I discovered Miss Howitt worked in a laboratory in Honolulu. I had never thought beyond grass skirts swinging on shapely hips and flower wreaths being hung round the necks of blasé tourists. Who knows that, if that tyre had not exploded, I might never have discovered that there are laboratories in the Hawaiian Islands. At the next stop she told me she was making for Cairo.

"Cairo?" It was not long after *l'affaire Nasser*. Cairo, by herself, and here we were, still in Northern Rhodesia.

"Sure I'm going to Cairo I've got it all figured."

Sure I'm going to Scutari, said Miss Nightingale. Sure I'm going to get votes for women, said Mrs Pankhurst. Sure I'm going to ride naked through Coventry, said Godiva. That's how Miss Howitt said it.

"It's simple as far as Nairobi but from there to Juba, that's the stretch that's got me worried." The horn blared. In we piled and off we went.

To make up for lost time the driver got down to some really fancy roadwork, this time without his singlet. On corners I could gauge the amount of strain on the steering by the way his muscles stood out below the shiny black skin. He hardly cast us a glance but sang a lot. The silver-metal bus vibrated like an aeroplane about to take off, unbearably, till you felt no metal yet discovered could stand the fearful battering I saw Miss Howitt through a heavy curtain of dust; now and then she brushed at her smart, grey skirt and blew along her slim, brown arms. It stung my nostrils like red pepper.

But at least the sun was going down and our little box was cooler. Just before sunset we stopped to pick up

firewood. Out we bundled, spluttering and thumping our clothes. Gnarled and twisted lengths of grey wood were dragged from the bush and passed up to the men on the roof; who tied them among the mountainous pile of bicycles and cardboard boxes, pots and pans.

"Can you tell me what this is in aid of?" I confessed I could not.

"Does this thing really burn wood?" I said I doubted it but you never knew. A man fell off the roof, winding himself painfully *en route*. No one helped him or even looked sympathetic; all merely went on with what they were doing, grinning and jabbering. It is a strange thing about Africans, they show no interest or real sympathy for another's pain unless a member of their own immediate family is concerned. I was to notice that often.

Three of our bicycles fell off and in the effort of restoring them to the roof another man lost his balance and came crashing to the ground. It was slapstick stuff and kept them all in fits. The evening was getting cold. Miss Howitt put on a bright blue cardigan and then a little waterproof jacket, belted and quite the thing. The man in the army greatcoat now had an army blanket draped over his shoulders. The horn tooted. In we piled and off we went through the dusk. I dozed till we reached the barrier into Tanganyika. Out bundled everyone except Miss Howitt and I. Squashing my nose against the glass, I could make out people milling, *askaris* moving about with lanterns, our driver still naked to the waist arguing with a crowd of old men. Some young girls crowded into our doorway, giggling and staring at Miss Howitt powdering her nose.

"*Jambo*," they shrilled.

"Say, what does *jambo* mean?" I could not tell her. I was useless, I could tell her nothing, nothing at all. She sniffed but it may only have been the powder.

"*Jambo, bwana.*" An *askari* put his head inside. "Come pliz."

"Does he mean me too, is that right?" We followed

behind the swaying lantern along a gravel path. Frogs were croaking somewhere close. We reached a building; the *askaris* tapped respectfully on the door.

"Say, just what is all this, that's what I'd like to know?"

"Yes?" A stocky young man stood in the open door in shorts and socks. Behind him a sultry radio voice promised to love someone for-e-ever.

"Got your passports?" Rather a surly young man, I thought. He took them.

"You'll get 'em back in the morning before the bus leaves. Goodnight."

We were driven to the rest house at Tunduma. The bus, having dropped us in the darkness near the suggestion of buildings, drove away. I for one very much doubted whether we should ever see it again. We had our luggage with us but only because I'd insisted. Poor Miss Howitt had begun to wilt after thirteen hours in that little hell-hole and I was able to do a masterful act, thus making up slightly for my ignorance.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" moaned an invisible female voice.

It was another of those disembodied torch-beam meetings.

"Why can't the bus ever be on time, and the cook drunk again! The others have started supper. I'll show you your room, then if you wouldn't mind coming straight across to feed. The others have started, well they had to really. I mean they couldn't go on waiting and all the food's stone-cold, the cook let the fire out, that's what he always does when he gets hold of any beer. Oh, dear, it's all too much sometimes."

She showed us a room with two little beds side by side as cosy as you please, in a small grass-walled hut.

"The toilet's just across the way." She flicked her torch beam swiftly up and down the familiar shape of the upended coffin.

"But we must have *two* rooms," said Miss Howitt, perilously close to tears.

"That's right," I added, to show I was on her side.

"Are you not man and wife?" asked the woman.

"Certainly not," said Miss Howitt, a shade too emphatically.

"Er, no," I mumbled.

The situation was put right. We got two match-box rooms next to each other in a larger hut and separated by papier-mâché.

The others at supper consisted of an upright couple from Bishop's Stortford visiting their son, a Provincial Commissioner in Nyasaland; a very old woman, who remembered seeing a soldier galloping with the news of Rorke's Drift and the approach of the Zulus—"Then his horse fell dead under him. We expected Cetewayo's *impis* but the little band held them at the Drift"—; a wrinkled, brown woman-doctor with cropped grey hair and a fund of amusing stories. An eyeglass hung from a black string, and her blue coat and skirt were cut with masculine swagger. We drank our coffee by the fire, below a colourful portrait of the Queen, listening to gripping tales of Bishop's Stortford.

"Is that right?" queried Miss Howitt, her head drooping with fatigue. She had removed her hat and her dark glasses; the shape of her face, the dark eyes, the jet-black hair and the way her skin had taken the sun hinted at a distant trace of coloured blood. She was *huriya*, a black-eyed girl.

"Well, I for one am going to turn in," announced the doctor.

"Breakfast six-fifteen for the bus passengers and shall I make you sandwiches? Tomorrow's not a long trip, but you never know with these buses." The harassed woman collected the cups.

"There was nothing to stop the Zulus after that," said the old woman. "Only a few rifles, that was all. I remember my father saying . . ."

"See you in the morning." The doctor strode away.

Miss Howitt excused herself. The last words I heard as I started for bed were: "Good lord, d'you mean to say they were *all* killed?"

"Every man jack!" said the old woman with relish.

I went to bed in the little rustling room hoping I should not talk too loudly in my sleep, for I could hear every little sound made next door.

The bus swept in to pick us up just after dawn. We had time for a quick breakfast, time to pat the tame duiker in its smart red collar, time to take a picture of the tame colobus monkey sulking on his tree-stump, and then the horn blared. In we piled and off we went, back to collect our passports from the young man in his socks, but he was very smart in white uniform, all smiles, gallantry itself to Miss Howitt

"We don't get many Americans travelling by bus, y'know."

"Is that right?" Down came the stamp, we were passed as harmless and free to go. In we piled and off we went. The driver was trying out a new line in hats, a well used pork-pie thickly painted a brilliant shade of blue; round his neck he wore a natty spotted scarf, but again no jacket. His co-driver, who never seemed to do anything, favoured a rainbow turban. The African passengers were very silent, sleeping with their mouths drinking in the dust. Soon it was very hot.

The country was opening into views of hills and *dambos*; we were no longer hemmed in by the interminable, scrubby bush of Rhodesia. The land gave the impression of greater fertility, the green was greener, more maize grew and large clumps of bamboo exploded against the burning sky. The native women covered their charms with gayer, more vivid, clothes, striped and checked, shown off to perfection by the black skins. But the huts were dilapidated and moth-eaten, the roads worse.

At another barrier we stopped and drove off the road beside some whitewashed buildings. Various notices told

us about Customs and Rabies Quarantine. Our luggage was laid out in the hot sun, we were led to an office where a twittering little Indian Customs officer handed us forms to fill in.

"I kinda thought Africa was all one country," said Miss Howitt. "I never realised there'd be all this business of fronteers."

"No whisky, no gin, no silks, perfumes, cameras, typewriters or bullets?" He rattled off a list of Satan's goods.

"I have six pairs of . . ." He waved her to silence.

"What matter? You have no whisky-no gin-no bullets-no silk vests. Sign please. Tank you." I declared a camera and a typewriter. He inspected them cursorily.

"They have little value, it is all right. Sign please. Tankyou."

The small automatic burnt in my trouser pocket.

The bus was ransacked from end to end; all the bicycles were taken off the roof, every bundle was opened and sifted; *askaris* shouted and waved their little sticks; the Africans stood patiently in the sunshine. Two hours later the horn summoned us from the white coolness of the office. In we piled and off we went.

"Good-bye, tankyou, tankyou." What for? We had given him nothing.

Our way led us down a fierce curving hill, round tortuous bends where the tyres dry-skidded in the thick dust and took us close to nasty drops; on to a wide plateau of gently waving grass. Mountains hovered in the distance and the glare was worse, the sun striking off the grass as off the burnished surface of the sea. Then down lower, into a beautiful luxuriant valley full of dark green trees and straight blue gums, cypresses and palms. The huts turned to houses, white and yellow, roofed with red and green, as we entered Mbeya and rumbled to a halt in the market square. At once a horde of little ragamuffins surrounded the bus and rushed us with our baggage to a hotel a few hundred yards away.

"But we don't want a hotel; we want another bus."

I mentioned that to the Greek who ran the hotel.

"Iringa?" He shrugged his sloping shoulders.

"Heh, Frank, when's the next bus to Iringa?"

"How should I know? Sunday, I think." Frank was an Eurasian gentleman with a tawny, shiny face and tawny, shiny skull absolutely hairless, young-old and immensely sinister. I expected him to pare his nails with a wicked six-inch knife, or to shoot us down, smiling blandly.

"Wait, I look." The Greek consulted a timetable.

"He's right, Sunday, eight o'clock to Iringa. You will want beds?" It was midday on Friday. Yes, we would want beds.

The rooms were comfortable, in an annexe across a small garden from the main hotel, but our lunch left a certain amount to be desired: glue-paste spaghetti; rope-sole meat; and a trifle, neither hot nor cold. Our fellow guests were, in the main, swarthy, silent men in shirts and shorts who murmured to each other in Portuguese or Italian. The water tasted bitter, and the beer blew you out with the blast of a stomach pump.

"I guess I'll take in the town," said Miss Howitt. She did not want to miss a moment of her genuine travel.

"See you at drink time."

"Yeah, maybe." I slept away the hot afternoon. Then I went to the station—East African Railways and Harbours—to inquire about the next stage of the journey. A ferrety Indian hissed at me between blackened empty gums; I found him hard to understand. From him I bought two bits of pasteboard allowing us to complete a few more hundred miles across Africa.

Mbeya strikes the casual traveller, the passer-through, as being shabby and rather dirty, crouching below a bare grassy mountain, teeming with Indians and Greeks. The Boma was set among technicolor trees and shrubs; the Union Jack was enormous; the cathedral was very fine indeed and there was an extremely pretty girl in a

little confectioner's shop who sold me two bars of soft, warm chocolate. Indian music wailed from behind bamboo blinds or lace curtains and tough-looking white men drove about in jeeps or old lorries. I met the upright couple from Bishop's Stortford.

"We're thinking of going on," she said, "to Mwanza."

"On the lake, y'know. Like a lift?" he asked.

"Very kind of you, but I'm going north," I said.

"Ah, well, next time, perhaps," he said.

"Yes," I said.

"Good-bye," she said.

"So long," he said.

"I hope you have a good trip," I said. And the world said, that is that. The end of yet another short acquaintance-ship. Scurrying leaves brought together for an instant by the breeze, then, poof, away they go in different directions. What on earth could he have meant by next time?

In the evening Indians came to drink in the bar and on the veranda, but no Africans. Brown coffee was admissible but not black. The women were either dark and enormously fat, or fair and petite, there seemed to be no ordinary ones. The dark fat women possessed many dark fat children, who loved their own voices. In the bar a dapper little group of Italians played darts in a very Southern way, posturing and fortifying themselves with Cinzano. One young fellow wandered in and out dressed in abbreviated shorts and with calf-length boots on his bare legs, a ten-gallon hat rakishly on his head. He was trying to grow a beard, thick in patches.

I dined alone that evening. Miss Howitt did not appear. Maybe she had got a lift. On the notice-board people offered seats in their cars to all parts of Tanganyika, or Africa even. One had said: 'Seat available to Durban. Go shares on expenses. Male preferred.' Durban was something in the neighbourhood of sixteen hundred miles. A brave advertisement, I think.

The swarthy men were less silent after dark and one

of their women made a lot of noise, sitting waving her arms with her bright auburn wig tipped slightly over a tiny shell-like ear. The waiters were dressed as drago- men and supremely uninterested in their job. After supper I glanced at a pre-war *Country Life* in the bar, listening with half an ear to a conversation between two men, one of whom I took to be a vet, and the other a timber merchant.

"I told the chap it was rinderpest, but would he listen? Would he hell! Cheers." The guggle-guggle of beer.

"By the time the wood has been transported to the line of rail there's not a sausage left for yours truly. Cheers." Guggle-guggle

"It's no use, man, the Africans'll never look after their animals properly. Why not plant the trees closer to the line in the first place?" The youth in the calf-length boots wandered in.

"Hi, Bob! Hi, Joe! Time the place livened up a bit." He threw his huge hat at an inoffensive lizard on the wall.

"Some of the boys are coming in later," said the vet.

"Christ, boy, I could use a bit of fun!"

I walked across the garden to bed. Bats flew about and the shrill music of the cicadas was faintly intoxicating.

I climbed the grassy mountain, following little paths worn smooth and shiny like the elbows of a well-used suit, over little grassy hills. There were not many trees, a few solitary thorns sprinkled on the hills; in the deep, clefted valleys they grew close and green, broken here and there by the yellow acacias and the breath-taking daubs of scarlet, the flowers of the flame trees. On the lower slopes of the mountains some minute figures were cutting grass; women passed me on their way to the town carrying bulky loads of grass; the gentle pad of their bare feet was very soothing, their hips swung free beneath the bright colours of their garments. *Jambo*, they said; *jambo, bwana*.

As I climbed the slippery side of the mountain, the plain below lost itself in the trembling lavender haze and the wind freshened, but it was a warm wind, whispering through the heat of a perfectly cloudless morning. Every step took me nearer to the volcanic sun.

The last five hundred feet were steep, very steep, and I had to haul myself upwards by the tufts of grass. I lay on the summit and the breeze played delightfully over my burning skin, hissing in the grass, flowing over the curved grey boulders. White-necked ravens took badly to my visit and came swooping at me in shallow, whistling dives, their broad wings juddering as they bit into the air; from their awful, gaping beaks came a stream of raucous abuse. Far below midget vehicles trailed midget tails of dust, as though twigs were being dragged along the ribbon of road.

I made myself a small grass hat and lay grilling on that lonely empty summit, close to the sky, far from the strife and anguish of the plains. Give me shade, I thought, gazing at the circling ravens, like the hoopoes; give me shade, bring me food and water and let me stay up here for ever. But they brought me nothing, those miserable birds, nothing but the angry croak of their voices. Their shadows swept over me, but that was not enough against such a sun, and soon I had to go down to the world again to search for shade and water. The downward trip was fast, for the slippery grass grew bent towards the earth; all I had to do was sit down and slide, gravity did the rest. With singeing shorts and the tug of the slipstream in my grass hat, I shot towards the little river in the valley. Women stopped their work and their singing to watch me go by; I waved and shouted gaily; children scampered beside me, but on their small legs they could not hope to compete and quickly fell behind. I came to rest among the acacias with the blessed sound of water near by.

I doubt whether those women had ever been treated to such a spectacle in their humdrum lives, and yet, who knows? Perhaps white men come hurtling down the

mountain on their behinds every other day of the week.

"You look kinda hot," said Miss Howitt, glancing up from her nasty brown fish.

"I am kinda hot." I told her about the mountain.

"Is that right? All the way to the top? What did you want to do that for, for Pete's sake?"

"See the view, get some exercise." Why try to explain? One's own fierce little joys are so seldom of interest, they sound so boring and stale when put into words.

"Tomorrow's a long run. Two hundred and forty-five miles."

"Oh?" I said. She returned to her book. I toyed with soggy fish. Flies buzzed below the yellow ceiling, waiters leant against the brown walls yawning, and the swarthy men picked their teeth. A smell of cooking drifted from the kitchen. At that moment I disliked Africa quite intensely.

[15]

WE left early next morning in a smaller shabbier bus, but one with greater freedom for the Superior Traveller. A young Sikh joined us, ivory-skinned and very polite. On the front seat of the compartment sat a villainous-looking conductor and the spare driver, tearing at lengths of sugar cane with strong white teeth.

Soon we began to miss the big silver bus and the confident power of its great engine, for this one was hesitant, not up to the task of getting us over passes of eight thousand feet and more. Revolving metal ground out a rough song beneath our feet and much steam wisped from the radiator as the poor old thing crept up the long hairpin hills. The views we saw were staggering, which was as well for we had plenty of time in which to study them while we sat to cool or inched past other buses on the shocking corners.

This was a cultivated land where strips of emerald green cut through the squares of dead-brown maize, barley, wheat and beans. A land of ledge cultivation; of little villages and clusters of neat conical huts perched on the rounded hills, each cluster surrounded by the dark rim of the protective hedge. Now and then you could see between mountains and away across rows of these little hills, the villages growing smaller in the hard blue distance. At the end of the blue distance fat white clouds sat complacently on the invisible peaks of more mountains. The road wound through prosperity and luxuriance where the colours were richer, the contrasts more startling. But the wind that blew the dust about the bush was cold; we put on our jackets and the ivory skin of the Indian took on a tinge of grey.

The bus made dreadfully heavy weather of the corkscrew hills; the driver mismanaged his gears and really that part of the drive was rather unpleasant. We stopped occasionally to pick up or put down, and in a long, rambling, dirty village Miss Howitt descended to buy a bunch of massive red bananas. The conductor acquired more sugar cane. He and his companion spat out the chewed pulp into a paper bag in the most civilised way; but the sound they made with their teeth was pure animal.

We began to come down out of the clouds into the heat of the day and into a landscape of thorn bush, indescribably arid and desolate. Nothing but naked thorn trees and dropsical baobabs growing from the pale sandy soil, miles and miles of it. I began to notice the Arabic influence in the turbans, the long *dhotis*, small white skull-caps and the fez. The country was flatter but always hovering in the distance was the perpetual hint of mountains.

Huge sunflowers bowed their heads in worship of the sun their god, lowering their bright golden faces to the parched and shining ground. Kites swung slowly in wide circles, planing on the rippling heat waves. We

removed our jackets, mopped continually at our necks and faces, sighing as we thought of the two hundred miles still to go. White houses lay beside the road, a long one-sided village. We stopped there for an hour to drink coffee and eat tinned frankfurter sausages.

"Dusty, eh?" said the wizened little Scot who served us.

"Six months of dust, six months of mud. Ah, well that's Africa for you. Nothing we can do about it." As we sat relaxing from the cruel impact of the bus, a safari lorry drew up outside. Four people came in; three men and a very lovely girl. They were dressed as for a film set, the men with big bush hats banded with leopard skin, the girl in shiny, well-fitting khaki shirt and slacks. Her nails were long and red, her tan make-up perfect. Somehow she had kept herself free of dust. I envied one at least of the men, though it was hard to see exactly which one.

"Got any beer?" They drank their beer, talking breezily of what they would do once they got to Salisbury. I wondered if it was in fact a scene for a film and if at that moment a camera was whirring. They were bronzed and large and dressed so exactly as I had always imagined men in the heart of Africa would dress. We sat spell-bound, Miss Howitt, the Sikh and I.

Was Miss Howitt labelling them as kinda cute? They finished their beer and stamped out, the lovely girl moving with the practised skill of a mannequin in her tight trousers. They drove off in a roaring cloud of dust.

"That's what gets this country a bad name," said the little Scot sourly. "The blacks see through it at once, of course they do, they're not stupid." What is it that they see through at once? The horn summoned us back to purgatory and we never knew. On we went, creeping across the map of Tanganyika as the sun mounted to the very summit of the sky, frizzling the shade to searing tatters. The prevailing feminine fashion had now altered to black; gone were the gay colours of the early morning,

here the women were identical as moles. The land was back to Rhodesia again; short flat-topped trees, pressed down by the heavy hand of the sun; the grass was higher and lonely, stony kopjes poked above the bush. In the sand along the edge of the road I could see the endless imprints of bare feet, the mark of Africa. Quite suddenly there were no more huts but long, low houses built of brown mud, roofed with curved mud and grass, the windows barred with wooden slats; smoke dribbling out from beneath the eaves, and skeleton mangy dogs lay along the baked walls.

We stopped for a stringy old man loping along, spear at the trail. After a mile or so we spat him out complaining volubly, and he continued to lope through the thick yellow dust. I wonder how he fared, how far he had still to go with only an hour of daylight left. Did a lion eat him? What happened to the stringy old fellow? We closed every crack against the dust which was worse than at any time since Kapiri Mposhi. It poured in, filling the compartment with dancing yellow grains that got into poor Miss Howitt's nose and gave her terrible snuffling, sneezing, dust-fever. Her poor black eyes streamed and though she tied a scarf across her face it did little to alleviate her distressing paroxysms.

"Soon we will be there," said the Sikh in his soft and gentle voice. I wanted to photograph some women with babies in their arms, but they screamed in protest.

"They are frightened of the camera, they do not trust the little black hole." The Indian spoke to them in Swahili but still they cowered away hiding their children from the white man's devilry.

The spare Superior seats filled with Africans at every stop and we found ourselves more and more cramped, our elbows ever tighter to our sides.

"Iringa is not too far now," said the ragged creature pressed close against me. "I learn English at the mission school. Not too bad, eh sir?"

I congratulated him; he beamed with pleasure, shouting

something in his own language to his friends. Much laughter and picking of teeth. They were very polite to Miss Howitt, sitting almost on top of each other to give her room. The sun went down behind a long hill like a Japanese ensign, with rays of red and lilac and orange.

The engine laboured on steep tortuous bends, the lights swept along brief lengths of low, white-painted wall between us and who could tell what unimaginable drops into darkness. By now we were hungry, dirty and cramped and longing only to leave that unsavoury bus.

It dropped us at a peeling hotel in Iringa, knee-deep in luggage. Behind the desk a formidable and disagreeable lady with a bird's nest of pitch-black hair told us she had nothing, nothing at all. It would have been better if we had taken the precaution of booking in advance. No, she was sorry, not a hole or corner, she was expecting a large party off the bus from Dar-es-Salaam. But Miss Howitt *had* sent a wire, so had I. The young Sikh stood silently behind us, his soft, dark eyes filled with melancholy and the first streamings of a cold.

"Well," said the disagreeable lady, "they never arrived." She went down a list with pudgy finger and said grudgingly, well she supposed she could fit us in, but only two of us, she added, glaring at the Indian.

"It'll mean doubling up," she told Miss Howitt.

"Anything," breathed Miss Howitt thankfully.

She snapped at me. "You'll have to go in with three others." Her fat, jewelled hand came down on a little bell. It was as though the management paid her extra to keep people away. I picked up my case and followed the Indian into the night, not wishing to spit into that fat, boorish face.

"Hotel?" I asked a knot of youths sitting on our luggage.

"*Ndio, bwana.*" They took up the cases. We followed them and after some bargaining obtained a double room at the 'White Horse Inn'. Oh, shades of Tyrol, of the merry slap of *Lederhosen*; of glittering snowfields and hot

wine in clean timber bars. This was a Greek establishment in the process of being re-decorated; a thin film of plaster dust lay over everything, even over the food. But the beds were comfortable, the bath water scalding, and the great bare bar sprinkled with voluptuous Greek females escorted by stout mamas and funny little men in smart suits and well-polished shoes.

We ate our dinner in comparative silence, broken every now and then by thick sneezes and nose-blowings from the unfortunate Sikh. I shall call him Mister Singh. He was smarting from the way in which the receptionist had treated him.

"We are so very sensitive, you see, to any form of colour distinction." He told me that between two mammoth sneezes. Trying to dodge the germs unleashed by those revolting explosions, I murmured sympathetically.

"Because of our skins, you see. Have you ever been refused entry into a hotel or restaurant?"

"As a matter of fact, I have, but only because of clothes, not skin."

He spoke in tones both indignant and yet apologetic. Over our coffee he told me there were very many Greeks in Tanganyika. "Owners of large estates, tea and sisal. Very rich people. Excuse me please while I sneeze again."

I took a stroll up the wide street to see how Miss Howitt was getting on. I peered through a glass door into the potted-palm lounge and saw her taking coffee with a stern woman in a leather jerkin and check skirt. I made a face at her and went away and as I passed the desk the painted woman said:

"We're very strict about colour in this hotel." It did not seem worth answering.

Mr Singh was inside his mosquito net. Hanging on the wall was his turban, and seeing it as a turban gave me quite a shock; it was like a made-up tie or a cummerbund with strap and buckle. No doubt the poor fellow felt too rotten to unwind the thing. His hair was down, I could

see that through the net, long and black over his shoulders and chest. His sneezes puffed out the side of the net in tiny lethal blasts. I made a very small hole in my net through which I might watch his activities. Very inquisitive, I know, but I had never shared a room with a Sikh before and was most curious to see if they performed strange and esoteric rites in the small hours.

Mr Singh did not; at least nothing more than frequent visits to the wash-basin for ghastly periods of spitting and hawking 'I am so sensitive, you see', I said to myself as I lay with fingers stuffed into my ears. He smoked ceaselessly and talked a good deal when not dislodging his cold. He was obviously highly intelligent and well-educated. It appeared he was a budding lawyer on a round trip of Tanganyika, trying to discover a suitable town in which to open a practice.

"And now, you see, I am on my way back to my family in Zanzibar." He was torn between Mwanza, on the Southern shores of Lake Victoria, and Tabora. I felt his cold might affect his appreciation of Ikinga.

"An old African gentleman sat beside me in the all-night bus from Mwanza to Itigi. We talked of course, all night, for it is difficult to sleep in a bus and when one cannot sleep one finds it is more satisfactory to talk, is that not so?"

"Oh, yes." I answered desperately. "My goodness, yes!"

"And he said that within ten years we should all be out of Africa. European and Indian he meant, you see, but it was only for the sake of argument he said it, of course, excuse me, please." He made his way to the basin. I stuffed my ears. The night wore on. Next door fortunate people snored. A slight wind rattled the curtains. He lit another cigarette. I dropped off, but he soon saw to that; the light flicked on. "I studied for some time at London University."

I grunted, toying with the idea of my little pistol. But

he was such a pleasant, sincere Sikh that I ruled out violence. His soft sneezy voice went on and on, murdering the hours. Sometimes I came out of a short doze and caught a sentence here and there.

"But then the western authors are more critical. What they do not like or approve of, they tear to pieces. Now we could never do that, you see, excuse me please . . ." I drifted away into sleep.

". . . my parents hate me to drink or smoke, you see. Only just do they allow such a thing as dancing, dancing you understand in the western fashion." The light snapped out. Soon a match flared, more smoke filtered through my net. A car rushed by. A piano was thumping downstairs. The light glared in my eyes.

"Excuse me, please." I groaned and thought of the bus that left at dawn. But then I remembered. Not tomorrow, but the next dawn. I had a day to idle away. Which day was this? Which night rather? How long had I been on the road since leaving Shiwa? If, in fact, I had ever been to Shiwa. But hotel . . . bus . . . hadn't there been a tame colobus monkey sitting on a tree-stump somewhere remembering Rorke's Drift? Voices rose through the floor, raised loudly in 'Sarie Marais'.

". . . you must realise that Zanzibar will never change. It may one day become extinct as did the dodo, but it will never change. They are a terribly lazy people. Why, when Princess Margaret was coming to the island, the Sultan gave orders for all the buildings on her route to be whitewashed. Then what do you think? Shortly before her arrival his inspectors went round to find nothing had been achieved, quite nothing. The Sultan's own workmen had to do it themselves, all quickly in a short time." Glass broke downstairs. I got out of bed, went to my case and rummaged for my pipe. Back in bed I said: "Tell me about India."

"I have never been to India. I was born in Zanzibar, you see."

"Tell me more about Zanzibar then." I lit my pipe. Why sleep? It's no more than a waste of precious time after all. Blinking my little red eyes and puffing at my pipe, I listened to his tales of Zanzibar.

Next day Mr Singh went to visit a firm of lawyers and I wandered about the small, dusty, unplanned town; through the bazaar quarter ablaze with colour and heat and smell; through the shanty town on the outskirts, along the narrow earth paths between the teeming mud houses roofed with rusted tin and flattened petrol cans.

The dogs were pitifully thin but no thinner than the children; the women looked destroyed by the continuous monotony of giving birth. The noise that burst from the fetid depths of these hovels was animal; many of the skeleton bodies huddled in the shade of the banana trees were no more than animals disguised in human form. The flies rose up in loathsome black swarms from the offal and the muck just as they do from the offal and the muck of the seething back-street areas of Singapore, Aden, Port Said, Naples.

And people must live out their horrible miserable lives among the offal and the muck and the swarming gluttonous flies; people like you, like me, with eyes to see with, noses to smell with, souls to suffer with. If they could unite and rise, I thought as I picked my way along the stinking lane, their pent-up savagery and misery would make The Terror seem no more than a little light entertainment. If some Prophet, some Prester John, some King of the Beggars was to appear to unite and lead the great flood of suffering, hopeless humanity existing (who can call it living?) in the filthy overcrowded hovels and huts of Africa and the East. If . . . Why not say, if the Moon should ever give out heat?

The world is too small, the coloured women too full of young, the claws of the whiteskins too firmly dug into

plenty. 'Let 'em get on with it, that's what I say, like they always have. It'll always even out; famine will see to that, and cholera, flood and earthquakes.' But now, uneasy in our guilt, we save unwanted babies, give them medicines and help the hordes to multiply faster and faster, till one day the teeming restless millions must surely overflow into the luxurious preserves of the white man.

I came out from the squalor quite suddenly and to the lip of a broad valley where a brown river ran lazily between tall papyrus grass, maize trees and the cool green strips of banana plantations. And in the burning beauty of the view I forgot my bitter and fairly useless thoughts. Small white houses were dotted all over the floor of the valley; women were scrubbing on stones by the water's edge, and brilliant clothes lay spread out to dry in the full gaze of the sun; children splashed in the shallows. Cravenly, not wanting to spoil the memory of the valley, I went back by the road avoiding the shanty town.

I passed along a wide road of respectable native houses with solid wooden doors and slatted shutters, many churches and little mosques and small open shops whose owners sat on chairs in the shade of rush-awnings to wait for trade. A battered Land Rover stood for sale outside the premises of one Gully. J. J. Makti, a fat friendly Afro-Asian.

"Hullo, sah, I say, why do you walk when you could ride, sah?" He hustled forward, wiping at the car with a duster. "Seven thousand shillings for you, sah." He sounded the horn. "Oh, but such a good machine."

I opened the bonnet. There was no sign of an engine. He tittered nervously. "I get an engine, sah, for you I get an engine." I left him blowing and panting and giggling as though saying, "Well, sah, you cannot blame a chap for trying, can you, sah?"

I met Miss Howitt, very cool and shapely in shorts. We had lunch together in a neutral hotel. On getting back to the White Horse Inn I found that Mr Singh had gone,

leaving a short note. 'I have decided to go to Morongoro. My lawyer friend tells me there are possibilities there, you see, and so I bid you farewell.' He ended with his address in Zanzibar and pressing invitations to visit his family there at any time. 'Not very cheery, I fear, but kindly and comfortable. I have three sisters who speak good English. Good luck.'

I slept soundly that night and woke refreshed for the journey to Dodoma. This next bus sported no less than three spare drivers in shiny peaked caps and suits of jungle green. Miss Howitt was there, fresh as a daisy, and two Dutchwomen in fawn raincoats; their hair was shoved anyhow under round sensible sunhats, their bare, rather hirsute legs vanished into sensible square shoes. Their features gave little hint of their inner feelings and it would have taken a braver man than I to delve beyond their stern, tanned faces. They were travelling with a great number of paper parcels. Later we discovered they had come from Aden and were *en route* for Rotterdam. They still had a powerful long way to go.

North of Iringa the earth turned to ochre, burnt sienna if you prefer; the road, the bush on each side, the fantastic pillared rocks jutting from the scrub—everything was painted thick with rufous dust. I or nine niles or so we descended sharply into the Rift Valley, performing our usual contortions on the hairpin bends, seeing the usual blue mountains trembling in their usual blue haze in the usual violet distance.

On the worst corners the senior Dutchwoman leant forward to tap forcefully on the driver's glass partition. Madness, for he always turned round to grin at her shaking fist. It was about the only time I saw Miss Howitt really laugh, but silently, quivering all over. The plain in the valley was dead flat, a sandy desert from which sprouted acacias, baobabs of enormous obscenity, straggly thorn bushes and patches of tawny grass which I kept on hoping to see astir with tawny lions.

This was Camera-Rolling Africa; the Africa of the station wagon; the Tented Film Star Africa; the Game Round Every Corner Africa. But no rhino thundered, wheeling and charging; not a zebra dazzled; none of the beasts, neither harte nor wilde, galloped across the open spaces. Hornbills we saw, and louries; francolin partridges and buzzards and doves, but nothing on four legs. We crossed the Great Ruaha river and stopped for refreshment in the middle of a treeless waste, where the dust devils were whirling and the heat came back off the dry sandy earth in shivering waves. A few cracked white buildings stood huddled close in this unfriendly spot and the heat fairly danced off the tin roofs.

The Dutchwomen did not wish to leave the stifling safety of the bus but Miss Howitt and I took our sandwiches to an erection resembling a tumbledown tram shelter where a twisted little cripple in a fez brought us Pepsi-Cola from a noisy building. Sand blew into our sandwich bags.

"I guess those women were right to stay in the bus." She suddenly caught her breath.

"Say, now isn't that something?" Four warriors had appeared from nowhere, tall men in blue togas who strode past, moving with a lithe and easy swagger. I could hear nothing of their progress but the rattle of the great hoop-rings hanging from their slitted ears. Their plaited hair was plastered in red mud into peaks reaching down between their slanting eyes. They carried gleaming silvery spears. Some women followed balancing tall earthenware jars on their heads, Biblical figures in their flowing brown robes and clattering bracelets.

"But they're absolutely bald," cried Miss Howitt in astonishment. Their skulls shone brown and polished. They joined their men and the whole group stopped near the bus, the warriors leaning on their long spears, the women squatting in the shade of the vehicle. The men gazed at the scene with a lofty contempt. I tried to see

them clad in European suits, but fortunately found the vision impossible.

Miss Howitt scampered away with her camera. I hoped she would not offend anyone. Soon she returned. "I gave sixpences to some of the women and got pictures of the sweetest little babies and a cute old fellow smoking a pipe."

Our fellow passengers came yawning out of the noisy building and climbed aboard, the warriors watched them impassively, one of them spat. In we piled and off we went. From there onwards till we reached Dodoma the landscape was bleached, dried up and petrified. The beds of the rivers we crossed were hard and white and cracked like dirty china; the road was hideously bad. Roadside fashions were changing, I noticed, bosoms were often bare and dusty, swinging in the sunshine. Outside a village a man stood on a raised platform and harangued a large concourse of waving, cheering people. Miss Howitt saw a duiker.

"The first wild animal I've seen all the way from Cape Town!" She bounced with excitement.

At tea-time we drew in to the Station Hotel at Dodoma. It was Tuesday evening. We should by rights have reached Nairobi.

[16]

THE Station Hotel, Dodoma, had the air of cool white grandeur associated with so many tropical hotels: all fans and palms and ice tinkling in long dewy glasses brought by silent barefooted waiters; monthly editions of the British daily papers; the illuminated glass case of expensive local trinkets; the cane chairs and little spindly tables on the shady veranda where the servants of the Colonial Crown sit in white clothes relaxing after the evening set of tennis.

Cars drive into the green, well-rolled grounds and other servants of the Colonial Crown get out, establish themselves on the veranda, order their drinks and gossip with the men they have seen and listened to all day.

Along the road lying between the well-rolled lawn and the noisy snorting station wanders a steady stream of Africans who stare at the *bwana* on the veranda, but do not soil the well-kept driveway with their naked, calloused feet. In the Station Hotel all is security and comfort and a reminder of Home. The sun sinks into a red flood, lights go on, little fairy lights hanging in the jacarandas and the flame trees. A large poster on the green notice-board by the desk tells one that there will be a dance held here next Saturday evening and that fancy dress will be optional. What's the betting that there will be at least one 'black-faced coon' shining with grease-paint and sweaty burnt cork?

I sat and drank my gin and tonic ('such a very good drink for the tropics', Tom always used to say, 'so clean, somehow') listening to the chatter and watching the bats swooping through the pools of light and, beyond, the shapeless procession of black people wandering by. I was wrong, of course, about the Crown being Colonial. Tanganyika is not a Colony. If I was to walk out of the grounds, so prettily illuminated, and to join the shuffling throng on the public highway, and to say to one of the shuffling black men: "I suppose you know, old man, that this country is not a Colony, good lord, no! It's a Trust Territory," what would he say? He might look across the gleaming tops of the cars at the bright, gay world of the veranda and say . . . He might say anything, mightn't he?

As is so often the way with nomads I was pitchforked into a double room already occupied. Every hanger was supporting a suit, every drawer was filled with clothing, both glasses bristled with toothbrushes. Books and papers littered every corner. Golf clubs stood erect in a splendid bag, tennis rackets jostled squash rackets, an expensive

camera hung unwisely from the hook on the door. The door burst open and a tall and burly young man tore in, flinging his clothes off.

"Make yourself at home," he shouted. "Chuck my stuff out of the way and install yourself. Glad to meet you. My name's Frobisher and I'm a geologist. Stationed here on the Atomic Energy Commission, now where the hell's my blazer got to? Ah! See you later." Seizing a tennis racket he rushed out and a moment later I saw him from the window bounding for dear life in company with a stout, jolly girl in a short, white ballet skirt. A dashing young scientist. By the look of him Frobisher had consumed a goodish whack of atomic energy. Poking about after uranium, I suppose.

I did see him later, and heard him, you could hardly fail to hear him even though the dining-room was large. He waved.

"How's it going?" I smirked at him.

"Jolly good!"

"Who's the boy friend?" asked Miss Howitt.

"His name is Frobisher."

"Is that right? He looks kinda healthy to me."

In the jovial bar I met a friend from army days. "Good lord, what a place to meet after all these years!" The last time I had seen him he was stuffed into a bearskin and scarlet tunic, just off to guard St. James's Palace against the sansculottes. He was thinner now, browner and with a slightly harder glint in his pale-grey eyes, but merry as ever, and we passed a happy hour.

"You know," he confided, "I only came out here for a holiday and I've been here ever since, five years exactly next week."

"You'll go home in time, I imagine."

"I doubt it. I like it out here. There's something about Africa that gets you, or at least it does me. No, I don't think I'll ever go back to England, dear old Blighty's shore, you know, the White Cliffs and so on. I'm in a job

I like, forestry, and one day I'll marry the ravishing daughter of some stinking-rich settler, we'll have rows of tanned little settlers, I'll drink too much gin, develop a first-rate paunch and come to hate the place like poison—the place, the people, the sun, the lot. But by then it'll be too late. The white man's grave will yawn and I shall tumble in, probably thankfully."

A party developed round Frobisher that continued for the greater part of the night. What with the drunken songs, the roar of cars and the clank of shunting trains, my repose was fitful. It became very hot as the sheets ruckled into warm ridges.

"Let's give 'em 'Annie Laurie'." They gave us 'Annie Laurie' and 'Daisy', too. I wondered how my friend was liking Africa. The party saw each other to bed in the rooms surrounding the flowered courtyard. Frobisher lurched in. For a while he attempted to undress in the dark but soon gave up the staggering swirling struggle and fell in a huge heap on his bed, tearing the mosquito net from the ceiling and lying motionless beneath its billowing white foam.

When I left to board the bus, he was still unconscious and I hoped he was not due to do anything dangerous with atoms that day. I sat beside a young African in a white corduroy cap; he gave me a polite good morning, then went back to his unlikely book: a fat volume on Metaphysics. The Dutchwomen gave the impression of women who had lain awake and angry throughout the night. Miss Howitt was her normal self, neat and tidy and inscrutable behind her dark glasses. It was the same bus.

We wound our slow way through the average quota of mountain passes and down on to another arid plain. I slept a good deal, waking on one occasion to find us halted opposite a cluster of low buildings. A corpse lay beneath a black pall on the dry earth beside the remains of a large fire, very black against the whitewashed wall. I got out to pick cotton-wool from a squat bush, using it to plug a shaving cut. It was softer than the stuff you buy

in long blue rolls and had a pleasant indefinable odour.

All of a sudden the trees were taller, the grass greener in little fertile valleys full of red and black cattle, the hills were all of a sudden spotted with blood-red bushes. A thin trickle of water crept along some of the river beds and the earth was gradually losing its parched and sandy look.

Next stop was on top of a long hill. The bus swung off the road on to a deserted little plateau alive with public conveniences. For Europeans. Men. Women. For Indians. For Africans. For the whole of creation. Those built for the relief and comfort of the Europeans were padlocked, but at once a scabby, bow-legged man came running waving a bunch of keys.

"Here, *bwana*, here, here, here!" Inside the heat was that of an oven, quite airless and dark. Terrifying. If the door jammed, then nothing but slow grilling torture and insanity. What a way to die!

They gave us an hour in Kondoa for refreshment. Someone had brought a local paper. A headline caught my eye: 'Lion Man Seen Near Kondoa'. I read on:

'... and is carrying a lion skin over his arm ... has scars on the back of his hands and on his knees due to walking like an animal. He is generally dressed etc., etc. ... sandals made of hide, and he carried a sisal knife in a sheath on his belt ... usual method is to attack lambs and young children whom he carries into the bush and kills. He has been known to sit under fruit trees wearing his lion skin to prevent other people from eating the fruit ... The public are etc. ... There is a reward of five hundred shillings etc.'

For a few miles I kept my eyes peeled for anyone sitting under a fruit tree, then my head dropped and I slept. When I woke and peered out blearily through the dust on the window I saw that the plains had shed their trees save for scattered thorns and taken on a covering of pale bronze grass; huge red ant-hills poked at the cloudy sky and acres of tall brownish maize stood motionless in

the windless afternoon, thousands upon thousands of heavy-bladed spears stuck in the iron ground. A few long, squashed houses broke that flat monotony of nature. Two men, tiny black dots, moved in that immensity of space, nothing else, except now and then the shadows of a cloud, running darkly across sunlit grass.

Shortly after this the metaphysical African gentleman closed his book and said calmly:

"Kilimanjaro. You can now see Kilimanjaro." He pronounced it as two words. Ever since I was a child I had wanted to see Kilimanjaro, the mountain close on twenty thousand feet high, the greatest mountain of a continent, a lonely magnificent freak. A name as romantic to me as the Mines of Solomon, the Golden Road, or the lost city of Atlantis.

And now there it was. Thrusting snow-white from the horizon close to the lesser peak of Meru, shining in the sun above a great grey wall of cloud. We were looking at the mountain from a distance of about a hundred miles and yet it seemed to be no more than perhaps ten or twenty.

"Ah, Kilimanjaro, *bwana!*" The spare drivers were in a fine state of excitement and yet they must have seen that first glimpse of the mountain countless times before.

"A fine thing to see, is it not?" My neighbour's eyes glowed with pride. "In England have you such a fine mountain?"

No, I said, we have not. The spare drivers were talking excitedly, they kept looking at Miss Howitt, at the Dutchwomen, at me, then pointing at the bright cone of snow, wanting to see our reactions to their mountain. They could not have been disappointed.

"My, but that's beautiful," Miss Howitt kept repeating.

"*Misouri,*" I tried. "*Misouri sana.*" Very good. That delighted them; the fact that I thought their mountain very good. I wish I could have told them how I really felt. If indeed I could have told anyone in any language.

As we went northwards past the distant shore of Lake Manyara, so the snow peak edged imperceptibly behind the nearer crest of Meru, midget Meru, a mere fourteen thousand feet and without the crowning glory of the snow.

"From Arusha you will not see Kilimanjaro, for that you must go to Moshi." He opened his book and continued reading. I shut my eyes in that grid-iron bus and thought of how I had achieved the third of my ten petty ambitions. I had crossed the Arctic Circle; I had lived in an Eastern jungle and now, from a rattling bus through dust and heat haze, I had gazed upon the mountain of Kilimanjaro, the Silver Mountain of native legend. As far as I knew, I should never climb it, might not even approach it closer, but I had seen it and was content. And the sight of it meant more than the glimpse of giraffe and zebra and gazelle we began to get, moving among palms and spreading umbrella thorns and splendid acacias forty to fifty feet in height. Miss Howitt was in ecstasies, looking out now this side, now that, exclaiming in wonder at the animals she saw. A pair of ostriches legged it for all they were worth across the plain on our right while on our left a giraffe, patterned in dark, glowing gold, stood alone in an area of fallen trees. Poor Miss Howitt. She needed another pair of eyes. Notices hung on barbed wire fences. So-and-so Ranch. No shooting allowed. No shooting for twenty miles. The impala belly-deep in grass knew, for they stood unafraid to watch us pass.

There were more cars now, going both ways and the dust was thicker than a London fog; frequently the learned African raised the book to his full lips and blew the dust from the pages.

Mount Meru rose higher into the slowly waning light, radiant as the sunlight struck full on it from the west. I saw a deep gleam of water lying below hills which must certainly have been painted on the sky.

Then quickly it was dark again and we saw only the reflection of our faces in the black windows, and the journey

began to grow tedious. The spare drivers slept, dusty black dolls swaying about with slack mouths; the Dutch-women sat stiffly upright, determined not to weaken in front of lesser mortals; Miss Howitt kept her small nose pressed to the glass in the hopes of seeing the night glow of animals' eyes; the scholar beside me read on, turning the pages slowly and firmly. I thought unromantically of a bath and a stiff drink.

After an eternity the scholar put away his book, stretched, yawned and said: "In half an hour we reach Arusha." He was quite right. Half an hour it was, to the minute.

[17]

ARUSHA could be called—very likely is called—the Mecca of the big game tourist, the very hub of Safariland. I stayed at a hotel possessing in the words of the brochure, '... the atmosphere of an old established country inn ... where mine host auctioned farmers' produce on Fridays ...', facing on to a square with a sign reading: 'Half way between Cape and Cairo'. The taps in my room reminded me of German East: *kalt und warm*. The room itself was one of a row along the side of an open courtyard and the walls were painfully thin.

It was in the last days of June and on the first of July the hunting season would open; already the parties were thronging the hotel, white-faced and shiny in their brand-new hunting outfits. Tanned leathery men in broad-brimmed hats banded with the skin of leopard or lion or puff-adder carried rifles across the hall and arranged for battered tin trunks to be stored in the luggage-room.

In the bar and the lounge I heard all round me the keen inquisitive voices of the safari-ites as they questioned

their hunters about the prospects, the game, the weather.

"I'd kinda like to get a tiger," cried a small American honey in bush jacket, leopard-skin waistcoat, slacks and golden peep-toe sandals. The hunter did not even wince. I imagine he had heard a lot worse.

"Fraid you'll need to go to India for that." He was a squat, sturdy fellow and his little pointed brown beard jutted pugnaciously.

"Gee, is that a fact? Don't you keep tigers in Tanganyika?" The hunters all had young assistants who did the fetching and carrying, the meeting of the clients at the aerodrome; the organisation of the carriers, the camp, the transport and so on. One day after a long probation they themselves would be in charge of safaris; on their shoulders would rest the responsibility and the worry of providing sport and protection; of being a guide, instructor and host; tactful and yet firm. And always the knowledge that, whatever else happened, the client must be brought back alive.

Miss Howitt and I had dinner together and watched the budding Tarzans as they marched about in their new and often squeaky ankle boots of pale grey hide, in their starched bush jackets with the cartridge loops stiff and new, passing below the grinning teeth of various stuffed lions whose mouths were permanently open in awful frozen snarls.

"There are a lot of your countrymen here." She was looking less severe; she usually did without her little white hat, and not a hair out of place.

"Yeah." This was not one of her talking evenings. During the braised beef she said:

"Tomorrow Nairobi, and I can't say I'm exactly sorry at the idea of no more buses."

"It's been quite a journey."

"It sure has." Without her glasses she would be quite pretty, I suddenly realised.

We had our coffee in the lounge, Miss Howitt sitting

prim and straight like a nervous schoolgirl drinking tea in her first hotel. Conversational fragments drifted from all corners of the room:

"To stop a charging buff you need more than a three-eighty."—"Sorry, Dan, I don't agree, I've shot the brutes for the last . . ."—"Say, will somebody please tell me what it's all about."—"Oh, I gave him the sack pronto."—"No, I said, tinned *plums*, hell's teeth, don't you ever listen?"—"Are we really going after rhino?"—"Exploiting the African eh, George?"—"Exploiting my . . .!"—"But say, Dan, what does your wife do when you're out on safari?"—and a gem which might have meant anything: ". . . so what the hell could I do? I mean, the chap was up and down and in and out in half a blink of a newt's eye."

The waiters stood about the walls, identical in white *kanzus*, green sashes and flower-pot fezes. They moved without a sound among the tables, bringing fresh supplies of beer and cigarettes.

"Well," said Miss Howitt rising to her small feet, "I guess this is where we say good-bye." She held out her hand.

"I'll see you off in the morning."

"The bus is kinda early."

"I'll be there." She walked away. For a brief uncomfortable period of time we had, so to speak, been thrown together in circumstances which might well have leaned towards intimacy, and yet all I knew of her was the fact that she came from Honolulu and that she still had a very long way to go, entirely by herself, before she reached the sanctuary of home. For a moment I toyed with the idea of going with her to Juba and then along the Nile to such places as Omdurman and Khartoum.

I would miss the little white hat and the huge sunglasses and her drawly, 'Is that right?' But there would surely be other travellers between here and . . . wherever I was going. I wandered round the lounge and the hall, staring at the stuffed lions and wishing I could go on safari; my eyes roved across the glossy post cards; of

elephant below Kilimanjaro, of zebra and giraffe, feathered warriors posing in threes, artistically arranged pictures of black women, their large challenging bosoms thrust naked against a background of brassy sky. A map of the local district, a rack of travel brochures. I picked one out at random and read about the Mountains of the Moon. As I replaced the colourful pamphlet I caught sight of a motor trader's advertisement. Idly scanning the list of genuine bargains I saw, right at the bottom in small print, the offer of a vehicle with Estate Body, Suitable for Safaris and Rough Work, 3000 Shs.

"Excuse me," I said to the girl at the desk, "is that a good garage?"

"I believe so, yes," she answered glancing up from her list of figures. Guided by whatever force it is that seizes on us to alter our plans without any sort of warning I picked out the folder.

"May I take this?"

"That's what they're for." To catch fools like you. The eyes peering sharply through the glasses had seen all sorts. I went to my room with the first seeds of a perfectly crazy notion germinating in my head.

The bus, that awful bus, left from under the clock in the square, kinda early. I had breakfast with Miss Howitt, a silent, rather preoccupied Miss Howitt, thinking perhaps of how she was on her own again and of how many miles lay ahead. Perhaps she was truly thankful, I don't know.

The moment came, as such moments luckily often do, in a flurry and scurry of a minor panic, as she discovered she had left one of her cases in the hotel. It was found and brought and more small change glinted in the sun, more nodding and bowing of the flower-pot fez.

"You won't have a bad trip to Nairobi; it's tarmac to the Kenya border."

"Is that right?" The bus moved off, a wave, a last glimpse of the white hat and Miss Howitt had vanished from my life, as far as I know for ever.

I walked slowly to the hotel to inquire the whereabouts of Macaulay's Garage. Rain began to fall from a steadily blackening sky.

Macaulay's Garage was quite some way from the square, on the northern outskirts of Arusha, where bricks and mortar ended and mud huts began. I walked through the trading area, pestered at the doorways of the shops by smooth Indian patter; it rained the whole way, hard, and the water bounced off the greasy pavement and cascaded off the tin roofs; passing cars threw up heavy grey spray over the bare black legs of the Africans; the brown togas of the Warusha women crouching by the maize-grinder clung close to their bodies and the rain gleamed on their shaven skulls; an unending procession of natives moved along the road towards the town carrying baskets of produce, some with sacks over their heads, and an equal number moved the other way sloping along into the teeth of a nasty little wind which whipped at their ragged clothes and caught at the robes of the women.

I spent the whole of that day and most of the next in the company of a young man dressed in a leather jacket, black jeans and dusty cowboy boots, trying to make up my mind between a very large American car, old and powerful, and the van with the estate body. The former had no window uncracked and no stuffing to speak of left in the seats, but the engine sounded adequate and the tyres were good. But the latter tempted me more, for in the back there was room for a small mattress and any amount of tins and boxes.

"Real safari car, she'll do you a treat. I've been all over Africa in her and she's never let me down yet."

"Could I try her?"

"Certainly, we'll go out straightaway." Cowboy was a man of action. She had one of those silly little gear levers on the steering column that always give the impression

they are going to jam. This one did. But that was nothing. We drove, I suppose, about ten miles; on the tarmac she went along nicely. The steering was perhaps a little too independent and every bump communicated itself very forcibly to the back of one's skull.

"Turn off here," he said, "and you can try her on the corrugations." The corrugations are just exactly that, and as well as being that are deep in red dust. Try driving a Municipal Dust Cart filled with pots and pans over a ploughed field—it would not be too different. The steering-wheel struggled like a live thing in my hands and the machine itself careered from side to side as dust belched and squirted through a hundred cracks and crannies; the noise was deafening.

"Go a bit faster!" he yelled. "No control on this stuff, not below thirty, best speed's around the forty-five mark." The needle crept up; every now and then all four wheels left the road at once as she bounded like a great unwieldy ballerina through the blinding dust. He put his lips to my ear and bawled: "This'll find out any little things that need doing."

The exhaust pipe fell off soon afterwards, rendering any further conversation out of the question till we got back, bruised and dazed, to the garage.

"She's got a good enough engine," I panted. "But the steering isn't too hot, especially on that corrugated stretch and . . ."

"You've never driven on it before?"

"Only in a bus."

"Ah, well, you'll soon get used to it. Look here, tell you what, I'll run you back to the hotel and we'll discuss the deal over a can of beer."

We sat at the bar and bargained. Finally I told him I'd think it over. I thought it over, putting down the pros and the cons on a piece of paper. The cons were numerous and some tiny spark of sense kept urging me to drop the whole idiot idea, but the pro had it, the single insidious

pro. With a car, I told myself, you are free of buses and long dreary delays in uncomfortable hotels; you can really *see* Africa, stopping when and where you want, and for how long you want. My mind went racing ahead to the vision of the one-man tent in the bush pitched beside the faithful car, or, if the weather was too inclement or the denizens of the wild too active, of myself warm and cosy on my mattress in the back. Come on, be a devil and take a chance! With a store of food and water you can't come to any real harm.

I saw the car, battered and filthy, but proud and myself ditto, at the end of a marathon trip. Over mountains I should go, across limitless plains, free as the birds in the air.

Next day I said I'd take her, with certain provisos: a new set of tyres, steering overhauled and the leak in the roof mended, and various other small repairs. How long would it take, did he think? Oh, a few days, perhaps a week; they were pretty busy, what with the hunting season beginning. That suited. I had to cable for more money and there was much to see around Arusha.

"She's nothing to look at but she's damned tough." Every day I trudged up to the garage to check progress and to watch oil-stained Africans tinkering and wrestling with my purchase; every day the car appeared to be in more and more and smaller and smaller pieces.

"We're giving her a thorough going-over while we're at it. I wouldn't want to think of you stuck somewhere out in the back of beyond." We laughed gaily at the thought.

Every other morning it rained but I was too busy getting ahead with my plans to care. I bought a mattress first, then made copious lists of the stores I imagined I might require. Blankets, eating utensils, a plastic basin, a canvas water bag to hang on the bonnet in the approved style, an array of tins to hold petrol, oil and water; candles, matches, rope, a *panga* made in Birmingham and an old Masai spear; an assortment of tinned foods, coffee—oh, everything imaginable. Various Indian mer-

chants had a field day, and my room became a veritable storehouse of good things.

In the evenings I sat in the lounge near the open log fire, poring over a map, planning every inch of the route to here, there and everywhere. The whole room seemed to be planning, maps were unfolded on every table, smoke billowed from a dozen pipes and the Americans grew more excited as the time approached for them to hit the trail.

To begin with, I should go to Nairobi. From there via Fort Hall and Nyeri to the farm in the Aberdares that I hoped to visit. Then westwards to Kisumu, following the line of the Equator for a hundred and fifty miles; round the northern shore of Lake Victoria to Kampala, the capital of Uganda. To that point would be three hundred and seventy plus another two hundred on to Fort Portal.

Nine hundred miles and I should be in the foothills of the Ruwenzori, the Mountains of the Moon. That was the first objective. The second—my pencil scurried busily about the map—was the crossing of the Central Serengeti, that vast plain lying between Arusha and Lake Victoria, where can still be seen game in the greatest numbers of anywhere in the world. Thousands upon thousands of wildebeest, zebra, topi, giraffe and their killers: lion, cheetah and leopard.

Two thousand square miles of sandy open country between five and six thousand feet above sea level. Arriving in July as I planned, I should miss the long rains carried on the wings of the South East Trades, and by the time I set forth into the unknown the land would be very dry indeed.

There would, however, be fewer animals, for most of the great hordes would have moved away in search of water; into the tsetse-ridden Western Serengeti and southwards into Ngorongoro Crater. But in their stead I should see the Masai, who come with their herds to settle by the waterholes in *manyattas* or temporary villages.

The map optimistically showed a thin red line of road

connecting Narok, the last outpost of civilisation in the north, with Oldeani, two hundred miles away on the other side of the parched inhospitable desert. There were no towns marked, only five black dots far apart denoting settlements.

"If there's a following wind," said an acquaintance at the bar, "then you're for it. She'll boil every ten miles."

"I'll be going from north to south."

"Bad. Couldn't be worse at this time of year. By the way," he added, "got a family? Made a will?" Oh, ha-ha.

"Still, don't worry, they'll never let you leave Narok, not by yourself. Expect they'll put you in with a convoy." He smacked a fine spray of whisky off his lips.

"Want my advice?" I didn't, but got it.

"Leave it alone. Go to Oldeani straight from here, main road half the way; then you'll manage the Crater with your bus in one piece. I've seen the Serengeti in the dry, man, and, take it from me, it's no ruddy picnic."

There was definitely food for thought in what he said. I digested his advice and kept an open mind.

As things turned out I spent nearly three weeks in Arusha—a nice little town snuggling below Mount Meru but without enough in entertainment to keep one occupied for twenty-one days, especially if every penny of every shilling was needed to pay the hotel and pay the garage an ever-mounting bill. A few spare pounds would have allowed trips to various places of interest. I could have gone to Moshi and spent some time gazing spellbound at Kilimanjaro, not that I should have seen much except cloud; even Meru, a mere fourteen thousand feet, was rarely visible through the thick rain-clouds. Game abounded in any number of extinct craters; hand out a hundred shillings or so and someone would be delighted to take you in his jeep.

I did a lot of walking, mainly to and fro between the hotel and Macaulay's Garage, but on the fine days I was more adventurous and took to the countryside.

Before you could attempt to climb Meru a variety of permits was required, a variety of officials had to be cajoled, a guide was necessary, armed I think, but of that I'm not quite certain. So I set off early to see how far I could get before being pounced upon by a Game Warden or a Forest Ranger.

The sky was as blue as an African sky should be, and the clouds suffocating the mountain were white as surgical cottonwool.

The road led past the Boma, alive with tall, black policemen very smart and natives looking lost, trying vainly to make head or tail of the white men's incredible ways; beyond the Boma I met a small boy staggering along with a huge slopping dixie of stew for the prison, and then bungalows with neat lawns and deckchairs and little garages for the cars of Civil Servants; children in sunhats played on a swing; a fat spaniel panted on a shaded veranda; most of the Africans I passed wore shoes.

Gradually the road worsened as it slowly began to climb into the cluster of small, steep hills dotted below the mountain. There were no more houses, only squat huts built of skeleton frames covered in brown banana leaves through which thin smoke lazily curled. Women hacked at the dry red soil of little fields, raising their bald, tawny heads to stare at the puce and puffing white man, chattering and laughing to see such a funny sight. Masses of children scampered from the maize and the banana plantations to stand and stare with huge brown eyes. In a tiny village revolting hunks of fly-blown meat hung in the sunshine and gaunt ridgeback curs came, snarling and arched, and girls in gorgeous robes of brilliant orange, crimson and the palest of greens moved gracefully with a loud clattering of the bangles, bracelets and wire hoops they wear on their shining copper arms, ankles and necks. Many of them were remarkably good-looking.

The track wound in and out among the dense banana groves dipping down to cross rough wooden bridges

spanning foamy rivers and streams and up the other side, crawling up the steepness of another hill. It was already excessively hot.

The men stood leaning on their long sticks and fluted spears, magnificent and lordly beyond description, their short brown togas draped with careless artistry over lithe and muscular bodies. Not for them the earnings of daily bread; let the women get on with such menial business. Among them were the old men, grizzled and walnut-visaged, squatting against the bank, watching life go by on the dusty tracks as they had done for the past twenty, thirty years.

"*Abari*," they said in polite greeting, inclining their haughty, imperious heads. "*Abari bwana*." No fawning, no flattering grins, just a great natural courtesy. Some of the older men touched the battered European hats they wore but without servility, merely acknowledgement of the greeting of another human being.

Some of the young warriors spoilt the aloof and regal pose by striding beside me, asking for : "*Cigar, bwana, tobac*." Their faces were those of a proud yet slowly decaying race, with all the fine-boned structure and sensitivity of inbreeding.

Every now and then I could see ahead of me the wispy vapour, the ragged lower edges of the clouds blowing across the slope of Meru, but of the summit there was not a sign. Some thin cattle wandered along the track, picking without much hope at the sparse and straggly grass or at the leaves of the coarse dusty bushes growing as a sort of hedge on each side. Their herdsman was in tears, which my sudden appearance made no better; his age, I suppose, was about six but he was a conscientious herdsman, for as an errant calf came running to rejoin the herd he at once cheered up, laying into the truant with a very small stick.

The hills were becoming steeper, the sun hotter, and I stopped often to rest in the shade of the banana leaves, hearing the distant murmur of water; the gentle slap of the giant leaves stirred by a warm breeze, the

muted chatter of voices from nearby huts and the tinkle of bells on the necks of little brown sheep. A smell of smoke hung in the air and the dry dusty scent of a dry dusty land, and at one place I watched a paradise flycatcher and the play of the sunlight on his long bronze tail.

I went on towards the forest line I could now see thick and green and massive as a towering wall; soon I came to a stone pillar set at the fringe of the trees, marking the entrance to the Forest Reserve; there I went from hot sunlight to a dull, cool shade broken by shafts of golden light, bright blades between the trees. I was at seven thousand feet and the air was colder now. I followed the narrow path between walls of nettles eight to nine feet high below the splendid trees, pine and gum, my eyes peeled for savage beasts and savage wardens requesting permits. The calls of birds were louder there in the stillness of the forest, and a piebald eagle perched watchful on a tall broken stump. As quickly as I had entered the trees, so I came out into a deep valley, a valley cultivated in patches and filled with a jumble of green hills supporting maize and beehive huts. At the other side of the valley commenced the real climb, masked by swirling, smoky clouds through which I caught a glimpse of dense jungle forest rising very steeply.

A jackal-buzzard planed in and out of the mists and I heard the croak of white-collared ravens and somewhere close the hollow repetitive call of a tambourine dove. Women came round the corner bent beneath monstrous loads of wood, the strain taken by thin leather thongs round their foreheads; when a child with them noticed me and shouted something, they dropped the wood and ran off down a side path, screaming shrilly in mirth or terror, I could not tell.

Once across the valley I lost the path and after blundering about in the undergrowth, chilled by the clammy driving mist, I decided to go home. On the way back I met a very colourful young man loping along in his tyre sandals, a

glittering spear like a rifle on his naked shoulder. Without taking to the nettles there was one-way traffic; we both stopped and eyed each other, and for the umpteenth time I cursed the lack of a common tongue.

His hair was done *à la Masai*, caked into strings of ochre mud hanging down the back of his neck, brought forward between his slanting eyes in a narrow peak. Over his shoulders was thrown nonchalantly strips of lion skin and at his waist hung a red-sheathed stabbing sword or *simi*. He was well over six feet tall and, as he moved, so his muscles rippled like little streams of copper.

"Masai?" I asked politely.

He shook his head.

"Warusha." An off-shoot of the Masai who have taken their habits and dress and who look to the uninitiated exactly like the original. He showed so much interest in my fieldglasses that I let him try and he was delighted with such magic, grinning and exclaiming in wonder. Then I made him turn them round and see the world reduced to midget proportions; that delighted him even more and I had a nasty feeling I should never get the glasses back. But I now knew that wherever I went in Africa I had a sure winner, a certain way of making friends and of placating any who seemed in any way unco-operative. He handed them back with a charming smile, as charming as a smile can be, with filed and pointed teeth.

Touching his spear I said: "*Simba*," and made stabbing motions.

His smile turned to loud laughter as he nodded. The blade appeared to be spotlessly polished; very likely, such is the horrid spread of progress, he used it to toast marshmallows or beetles.

He turned on his heel and went on his way towards the valley. He had looked happier than the miserable creatures who wandered the streets of Arusha dressed in cast-off rags, knowing a few words of English and thinking themselves educated, without a job, without hope;

sleeping in shop doorways under a covering of newspaper, sheltered from the cold night winds by little erections of old cardboard boxes. Some sat crouched in the alleys, huddling over small smoky fires. Some, unable to sleep, gazed into the lighted shop windows.

But that man—he had his own way of life, he still had simplicity, he still had pride. For how long? How long before the long officious arm of busybodydom reaches out for him?

The wind was blowing harder, rattling the banana trees, swirling the smoke, billowing the gorgeous orange robe of a beautiful girl with the sound of a flapping sail; a youth in a battered panama hat paid court to a girl virginal in white muslin and an old man joined me to walk by my side.

“Meru?” he asked between toothless gums.

“Yes.”

“Forest?” I nodded assent.

He broke into a storm of high-pitched cackles, raised his hat and vanished down a side turning. I continued through the sweltering afternoon, very content to have found such a beautiful backwater, for a few hours I had gone back centuries and felt immensely at peace. During the next week I went often along that path to the valley on the fringes of the clouds.

Which is the real Africa? The Africa of the semi-educated native who can read a few words of the newspaper that covers him from the long cold night, whose main ambition in life is to get an old cloth cap or a pair of laceless gym shoes, who is neither of his own people nor yet of the white world he longs so desperately to imitate? Or the Africa of the Intellectual, the white-collar black man who has been to the university and who is ready to take his place in any society? Or of the Indian traders, shops and merchants spreading ever inwards from the East Coast? Or is it the Africa of the settler, the engineer, the roadmaker, the White Hunter; the dusty golf course,

the clubhouse, tennis and civilised gossip in the cool of the evening and soft-footed servants making life bearable?

Or is it in reality still the Africa of the warrior with his magnificent idleness, his spears and his courage, his womenfolk tilling the soil? The Africa of simple, unexploited peoples, looked down upon by their semi-literate compatriots as so much 'black trash', still going about half-naked in the sunshine?

Deep down, perhaps not so very deep, lies the simmering, rumbling Africa of the *panga*, the spear and sudden savage death; the bleached and hideous skull lurking behind the tinsel curtains hung to hide the primitive secrets of a primitive land. Now and then the curtains are threadbare and the skull comes grinning through.

But the day was altogether too bright and splendid for such thoughts; those are the ideas more suited to a lowering, stormy dusk. Skulls and curtains! Well, really, I ask you.

[18]

ON my return to the hotel I was jerked back into the present with a severe jolt by an unexpected and incomprehensible cable from my bank. 'No funds immediately available', it said, or words to that effect.

The barman wore a gay little bolero jacket red and gold, and a cheerful yet calculated expression on his broad flat face.

"Whisky, large." I measured with my fingers.

"*Ndio, bwana.*" The outlook was sticky, the situation difficult to negotiate, thought was required, much thought. I had once been stuck without funds in Arctic Sweden, but then at least there had not been a gang of mechanics working day and night on a car which I could not pay for. The Americans were extra happy that evening for tomorrow

was *Der Tag*, tomorrow they would be big game hunters. What a lot of money they seemed to possess!

"Hello, there, chum." Cowboy hitched himself on to the stool beside me. "How goes it?" He nodded towards his companion:

"This is Gunnar." A rangy man with a shock of flaxen hair held out his hand. Gunnar was a Norwegian with the bluest of eyes and the most capacious stomach, into which he poured large quantities of beer.

"Well, we should have her ready for the road by the end of the week. Mister Carnegie here's going to the Ruwenzori." Gunnar beamed.

"There's just the steering to tighten up and the brakes to check, then you can be on your way. Got your licence yet?"

"Yes, no trouble at all." I felt a Judas, yet why spoil the party?

"Say, Dan, but is that a fact?" squeaked the woman in the leopard-skin waistcoat.

"Cross my heart, it's a fact," said the hunter.

Gunnar told a story all about how he and some friends had been driving somewhere in a truck and had spotted buffalo near the road. They had stopped and taken a shot at a bull. The bull had been impertinent enough to charge.

"And we only stop him when he's a yard away, down he goes and slither-slide right to our feet.

"A close thing," I said.

"Oh, *ja*, too damned close, I think." After a while they left me and I ate my dinner deafened by the popping of champagne corks from the safari table.

I walked through the dark wet streets to one of the cinemas for four shillingsworth of escapism. The rain had stopped when I came out and a narrow sliver of moon lay upon its back above the mountain; water dripped from the trees and ran gurgling along the gutters, and a shape curled in a doorway stirred as I passed, whining like a poor wet animal in its sleep.

In the lounge a man sat at a table working at sheets of paper—an elderly fellow, thin and haunted of face, stubbled and tousled. He glanced up.

"D'you go in for football pools? If you're interested I can show you a system that's bound to win. Bound to," he repeated, stabbing at the table with his pencil.

"I won six thousand quid once," he volunteered. "But the chap forgot to post the letter." I clicked my tongue sympathetically.

"I'm a mathematician you know, and I tell you this system of mine is infallible, absolutely infallible. Tell you what, I'll let you in on it for a fiver." His eyes were terribly wild and mad. I left him to his system. He often came in of an evening in his shabby, shiny suit to sit by himself engrossed in his figures, quite oblivious of what went on around him.

Next day I broke the news to Cowboy.

"That's all right, chum. After all, I've still got the car. But of course we can't do any more on her till, well, till we see how things work out. Fair enough?" Having expected an ugly scene, I found his reaction eminently fair.

"Naturally we'll have to charge you for the work done."

"Naturally." I did not look at the car, except once out of the very corner of my eye. She now had no wheels and no bonnet. Cowboy was taking no chances. However, we parted, as always, on the best of terms.

At the post office the Sikh who handled telegrams grinned to see me back again; we knew each other well by now. I made out a cable to the bank on the other side of the world, stating the grim situation as briefly as possible.

"That will be," he counted the words, "that will be nearly forty-five shillings," he said in his soft, musical voice.

I tried cutting out a word here and there, but at once the message lost its urgency.

"You want to change it?" I left the frantic plea for

help starting on its long trip down the wires and went, just out of interest, to the office of Safaris Ltd to inquire in a casual way about safaris.

"By yourself?" asked the man behind the desk.

"Yes."

"Would you require one Hunter or two?"

"Oh, I think one would be ample, don't you?"

"For one person with one White Hunter for a period of thirty days the charge would be one thousand pounds." He spoke crisply. I gasped faintly.

"And supposing I took two White Hunters?"

"Then you would pay, let me see, yes, seventeen hundred pounds. But going by yourself you would not require two Hunters."

"No." I replied. "No, I suppose not." Pause.

"And if I wanted to bring friends? Three for instance?"

"For thirty days, two thousand three hundred and fifty pounds. In that case you would of course require two White Hunters."

"Of course," I mused, gazing at the heads of the trophies on the walls. "That's a very fine sable."

"A record head."

"Really?"

"So is the impala."

"Indeed?"

"Those tusks weigh over two hundred pounds each."

"Good lord, fancy! You did say one thousand, didn't you?"

"You must understand our Hunters are completely booked up for . . ."

"Oh, dear!"

"But I daresay we could fit you in sometime towards the end of January. What were you particularly anxious to get?"

"Get?"

"What game do you want to shoot?" He tapped his pen on the desk.

"Anything really, you know, lions and things," I toyed with the idea of making a little joke—"mice, beetles, anything"—but he wasn't that sort of man.

"Our charges do not include the licences, hotel accounts, rifles and ammunition, nor alcoholic drinks."

"It's an expensive business," I ventured.

"Not really, not when you consider the danger attached and the responsibilities shouldered by our Hunters and the fact that our overheads still continue throughout the close season." The telephone shrilled.

"Excuse me a moment." He shoved a folder across the desk.

"You will find full details—yes, hello, yes, this is Safaris Ltd, yes, ye-es." He noted things on a pad. "Yes, that's quite clear, four persons, sixty days, yes, it is always two Hunters for that number of persons . . ." I looked in the folder and found the unknown party was letting himself in for a cool four thousand four hundred and sixty-five pounds. Ah, well, there's one born every minute.

Later I studied the details, and fascinating they were. I read that you could, among other things, be certain of excellent service and superb cuisine and the greatest possible comfort obtainable under the conditions prevailing in the wilds of Africa; there are, to administer to the slightest whim of the clients, porters, gunbearers, skimmers and personal servants, cooks by the dozen and drivers by the gross; men to carry the huge weapons with which the client will shoot at huge beasts, and others to support the huge weapon as the often unskilled marksman jerks wildly at the trigger.

'All tents' (I quote) 'are sun- and mosquito-proof with bathrooms and verandas attached, and luxury beds.' Portable generating plant to ensure the harsh glare of electric bulbs, the hum of the refrigerator.

I thought of the trip with Kalaka. Walking in most cases is cut to the very minimum, for the modern hunter prefers to drive after his quarry and save his cobbler's

bill. Light aircraft can be hired to visit the camp twice a week.

' . . . but we all at times wish to forget the worries of city life with its noise and bustle . . . ' So we make certain of taking as much of it as we possibly can with us into the bush.

In the future I daresay the stoutest and less roadworthy sportsmen will hunt from helicopters hovering above a herd of galloping zebra with a little canvas sack of grenades.

Killing big game becomes ever more commercialised, ever safer, ever more streamlined, but there is still glamour and drama for there is still the risk—I so nearly wrote hope—that some large and desperately courageous animal will now and then succeed in breaking through this mass of civilised paraphernalia and inflicting mortal injury . . . And if that happens, the unfortunate White Hunter loses his job and licence.

On the other side of the picture you find the men who have hunted a very great deal, who are as experienced and as good shots as the professionals; men who would scorn to use a truck when their own feet will still carry them; men who have had plenty of close shaves and still go back for more. But I fear they are a dying race.

Time passed slowly. No answer came from the bank. The receptionist had given up asking how much longer I would be staying, and Cowboy became slightly distant in his manner.

I walked; I thumped my typewriter in a lack-lustre manner, attracting the interest of the garden-boys who came to lean on their hoes and spades by the open window and stare with popping dark eyes. I watched the safaris leave, piling into their vehicles heading out of town in convoy, heading for the Hollywood bush; and as I watched, so I envied and turned back to my futile planning.

All the stores in my room mocked me as they sat

gathering dust; I was the flier without an aeroplane, the explorer with nowhere to go, the clown without an audience, the dreamer whose dreams were fast going stale.

The Red Cross Fête got me through another day. A hot, windless day with the mountain shyly showing its peak. There were stalls and coconut shies; a band including pipers; a parade of sleek and shining cars filled with sleek and shining people; the ancient Ford used by Field-Marshal Smuts as a staff car, driven by a man in Boer War uniform whose false curling moustache fell awry in the heat.

"Smuts must have had a fleet of old Fords," said a cynical man near by, "I've seen 'em all over Africa."

Somali women strolled in their black best, ghastly mauve lipstick smeared on their full lips, and powder crusted mauve on their cheeks. The usual mass of African children ran wild, chased by the usual sweating policemen. I took a lot of very boring snaps and drank a lot of very strong tea. Cowboy and Gunnar drove round in a low-slung sports car and won a prize, and imposing Red Cross ladies strode among the crowd nodding graciously to right and left.

Then quite suddenly things began to look up; the money arrived at the local bank and I could march into Macaulay's Garage with head held high instead of the furtive, shuffling gait associated with the bankrupt.

"Here we are, at last!" Cowboy's face brightened, then dimmed.

"Bit of a snag," he said. "She'll need a new differential."

"Oh!"

"We'll go halves." He rolled his miniature cigar to the other end of his mouth.

"How long?"

"Well, we've got to find one first. Gunnar knows a fellow who may have one out Voi way—let's see, it'll take him tomorrow and the next day before he's back,

then it's got to be fitted, if he can get one, that is—give us a week.”

I trudged back to the hotel finding little to enjoy in the colourful bustling street.

Next day I took the bus to Nairobi.

The early start was well rewarded by the view of Kilimanjaro thrusting white and glittering from a bed of roseate cloud. I was sandwiched between a solid middle-aged Englishwoman cropped of hair and robust of temperament and an unattractive Indian, unshaven and smelly. We sat in the Superior Compartment, six of us where there should have been four, and sweltered. The Englishwoman read her *Homes and Gardens* and used her elbow with telling effect at every corner; the Indian dozed and dribbled and three superior Africans talked in low tones.

North of Arusha the country resembles the Cheviots—rolling grassy hills and no trees—and the tarmac road curves up and down, up and down, in long easy sweeps; the blue of the sky was deep and thick like paint, the glare struck fiercely from off those grassy hills.

Soon the open grass vanished beneath sparse thorny bush; here and there tired giraffe leant on the little trees or zebra cantered away in a dazzling flicker of black and white raising the red brown dust. Birds of prey wheeled above the shimmering thorns. It was another seemingly endless stretch of Africa. Sun and dust and hard, merciless heat. The discomfort inside our part of the bus was by now acute; we were all trying to move our cramped and twitching limbs and becoming irritable as we did so. *Homes and Gardens* had slid to the floor, the Indian was smoking compressed animal droppings and coughing all over everybody. Behind, in the main part of the vehicle a few natives lolled and sprawled chattering happily.

“I normally make this trip by car,” said the Englishwoman with a shuddering sigh.

"You go to Nairobi quite often, then?"

"There and back twice a month. Know every damned bump on the road, every giraffe, every zebra, every native trying to cadge a free lift. Broke a spring last time out, that's why I'm in this damned bus. They told me at the garage my chassis' twisted; be hell's own nuisance if it is." I mentioned my purchase.

"Good man," she said. "You'll be on your own, do what you like, go where you like. On holiday, are you? Oh, I see, bit of damned business combined. Ah, well, life's not all beer and skittles, is it?" I said, no I supposed it wasn't.

"What year is she?" We talked cars for a while. People do not often mention the weather in Africa; instead they discuss the merits and otherwise of their cars, for a mechanical failure hundreds of miles from anywhere is not a bit the same as a breakdown within a few miles of a telephone or an A.A. man. In Africa breakdowns mean more.

To stand up to the ceaseless pounding of the corrugations a car must be tough; its carburettor must be prepared to gulp great dollops of dust and the tyres must stand the stones, the ruts and the heat. The woman told me all this and much else besides. At suitably timed intervals I inserted a 'yes' or a 'no' or a 'good lord, really!' I saw little of the passing scene, for her head or her bust was always in the way. Fortunately I should soon be travelling this way on my own in my own car.

"Yes," I said. Her glance was sharp and filled with suspicion. Perhaps I should have said no.

"I always call this bus the 'Masai Express'," she said sourly as we stopped yet again to pick up a single warrior, waving us to stop with his spear.

"Would you mind?" She leant across me flapping at the smoke from the Indian's cigarette.

"Oh, no certainly, it is finished, you see." He dropped the burning stub to smoulder contentedly until we tumbled out at Namanga River for coffee and sandwiches.

The tarmac came to an end at Namanga River and

from there onwards conversation was impossible; we sat thinking our own thoughts and gazing dully at the landscape jerking slowly by. On my side visibility was for most of the time, down to a few feet, fogged by whirling, swirling dust; occasionally the Indian drew my attention to some quadruped browsing in the bush, but the sight, however pretty, did nothing to alleviate a splitting headache and severe spasms of pain in my lower spine.

At Kajiado we stopped outside a flaking white building beneath a huge advertisement for one of the Colas. There we remained for an hour, hot, scratchy and bored; a procession of ancient and dodderly Somali gentlemen wandered in and out of the dark interior; the driver vanished, all the conductors vanished, we sat in our forgotten oven of a bus, at least one of us a prey to gloomy thoughts. I fell asleep.

As evening descended over the great plain, as the molten glory of another African sunset spilt its liquid colours over the rounded outline of distant hills, the Englishwoman stirred herself to say: "Those are the Ngongs, pretty fine aren't they? Not far now." She rummaged in her bag for a comb to touch up her short grey hair.

We drove down a long slope towards the lights of Nairobi.

I spent two days in Nairobi, doing a lot of walking along the hot pavements and most of the time thinking myself in Bombay or Calcutta. For the little open shops—the tailors, the grocers, the furniture shops, the hardware stores—they are all Indian.

Along Delamere Avenue the city is smart and tidy and prosperous with large shops, miniature skyscrapers pushing their way up, as though there wasn't the whole of Africa in which to expand sideways, but very modern, very progressive. At the end of the Avenue things began to slide; the streets ramble incoherently without sense of purpose or planning. There is an air of higgledy-piggledy

—let's put a street here and another one there. It sprawls. There are mosques of a grotesque ugliness, up-to-date cinemas, ramshackle, peeling houses, a sudden newly built shop, derelict spaces of hard yellow earth, a maze of narrow alleyways and cul-de-sacs.

In the sprawling part the pavements are thick with Africans, wandering idly, peering into the shops of the prosperous Indians; a few white women hurry with shopping bags looking hot and harassed. 'Buy, sahib, very chip.' Buy, buy, buy. The brown faces peer out of the dark, stuffy little shops, the dark eyes soft and cunning. The sun trapped between the buildings is hot and glaring; often a small savage wind whips up the dust and rattles the palms in the Avenue. I have no great love for cities and this one seemed neither better nor worse than any other. As usual, many thousands were herded together penned by concrete, this time in the heat, with different coloured skins speaking in strange tongues.

It was all there: the luxurious hotels; the gleam of plate-glass windows; the brand-new blocks of offices and flats; the shining cars; the limbless beggars; the poverty in the back streets—it was all there. At first it seems different, more exotic; the colours are louder, the sounds unfamiliar. But it is the same as any city, merely lit by a brighter hotter sun, that's all.

Two days were more than enough. Thankfully I caught the bus back to Arusha, breathing more freely as we rattled south across plains without horizon.

[19]

THEN at last the day dawned clear and bright, the day for which all Arusha, indeed all Africa, had been waiting with thudding hearts—my car was ready to take the road. And so, by Heaven, was I!

Cowboy patted her dented flank; a motley assortment of oilstreaked Africans stood back mopping their necks with cotton waste. She overflowed with petrol, oil and water; she was a bird poised for flight, an antelope bunched for the spring, a fish waiting to dart away through shallows; she was all the poetry of motion straining at the leash, she was . . . "Ready to take off, chum." With many delightful expressions of mutual trust and esteem we parted and I drove out of Macaulay's Garage for the last time amid a chorus of cheers.

Loading the stores was fun, for now I felt I was really getting somewhere, the period of frustration was ended, now for fulfilment. I also felt terribly pioneer and hawk-eyed, tough and devil-may-care compared to the flabby creatures sitting on the veranda drinking their after-lunch coffee, who watched with an interest tempered here and there, I think, with envy, just a little envy.

When everything was stowed and lashed I went to say good-bye to the manager and to the receptionist, who softened sufficiently to smile and wish me luck.

"Expect we'll see you back before long," prophesied the Manager walking slowly round the car I got in. I switched on. I pressed the starter. There was the whirring sound of little wheels, a hot smell and then silence, with the smell getting worse. Feigning nonchalance and very conscious of the coffee drinkers, I sat humming to myself, (Offenbach). Casually I tried again, no whirr . . . hot smell, silence.

"Push, *bwana*?" suggested one of the lounge waiters.

"Will you be needing your room tonight?" The Manager spoke in the manner of those in the presence of tragedy. I said I would nip round to the nearest garage.

"The Aga Khan died yesterday, don't forget," he said. That struck me as a *non sequitur*.

"Most of the garages are Indian, they'll all be shut." I rang up Macaulay's. Cowboy came himself at breakneck speed in his red jeep. He got to work with a screwdriver.

The Manager stood me a beer on the house. I fidgeted and fretted; time was passing fast, the sun was slipping perceptibly into the west and Nairobi was a hundred and eighty miles away.

"You'll make Namanga River tonight; it's a good road and there's a moon." Drive all night, I thought; there's romance for you, alone and purring through the milky, silent bush. I heard the engine spring to surging, pulsating life.

"Good luck, chum!"

I was off!

The sun was plunging into the spectacular brilliance of evening as we bowled nicely up and down the long curving hills; giant rays beamed across the sky in a vast multi-coloured fan—orange and blue and that radiant, quite unearthly violet. Soon I had passed the northern slopes of Mount Meru and there, thirty miles away yet so close that by making a long arm I could touch it, was the unbelievable beauty of Kilimanjaro—the shining summit, the snow spilling down like white lava into the flamingo circlet of cloud. I stopped to watch the setting of the sun and the glow dying slowly from the mountain, leaving it cold and white and spectral. Darkness flowed swiftly over the boundless empty hills until only a few remaining embers flared along the western rim of the world, then they too were darkened by the night.

When I came to press the starter the familiar smell of burning rose into the darkness. Inside the open bonnet it was a great deal worse. I turned the handle once or twice, then sat down on the grass to think. It did not seem to matter much one way or the other; I had my mattress and food. I tried to push her off the road. Nearby voices chattered in the little *ducca*, splinters of light speared through chinks in the woodwork, but no one came to investigate. After a while the moon slid into the sky

from behind Meru, gazing coldly down upon this useless mass of metal. A large bird flew close on swishing wings. Putting my head inside the open bonnet I tinkered ineffectually with the starter.

"Could it be the spark plugs?" inquired a soft, educated voice. The surprise, nay, stupefaction engendered by that voice coming suddenly from nowhere caused me to bang my head sharply against the bonnet top.

"Dear me, I am truly sorry, sir!" I peered closely at the apparition beside me—a Somali gentleman in a white *dhoti*, advanced in years but upstanding of carriage, with a towel turban perched like a monstrous toque on his head. He had a powerful torch and much helpful advice to offer.

Half an hour of tinkering produced results and the engine clattered into uneasy life, but the sparks from the shorting leads challenged the very moonlight itself.

"Very pretty, sir, but not convenient."

I wound tape round the leaking rubber and gradually trapped the mischievous electricity.

"You go far?"

"Nairobi."

"Ah, Nairobi, what a charming city!"

I wiped excess oil off my hands and listened as he talked of Nairobi, while other ghostly figures squatted on the opposite side of the road in complete silence. Not a car had passed.

"You speak very good English."

"Ah, sir, I have not always lived here," he gestured towards the little building, sighing heavily. "It has been a pleasure to meet you, dear sir."

I wondered whether so grand a person would be offended by the offer of a trifling remuneration. I need not have worried. At the scent of money the watchers surged across the road, faceless and formless in their rustling white robes as apparitions in a ghost story. He shouted one word at them and they retreated whining into the shadows.

"Good-bye, dear sir, and may excellent fortune attend

you in your wanderings." We salaamed each other. Then they all had to push.

The car went adequately behind her wavering lights but at no great speed, seeming to lack power on some of the steeper, longer hills. Gazing now and then to my right, I imagined that I saw Kilimanjaro in the pale wash of the near-full moon. And that surely made up for anything.

On we went, she and I, in comparative harmony up and over and down the sweeping inclines; in a smoother, more comfortable machine the effect would have been hypnotic. For there was nothing to distract the attention—no lights, no houses, nothing but the endless moonlit bush. Once or twice the red spark of eyes, the bounding shape of some animal enormous in the headlights. I sang to the refrain of the engine, tremendously content in my independence. No more buses, no more trains; no more hauling of heavy suitcases at dawn to dreary bus stations; no more herd travel. I sang louder.

Some miles short of the Kenya border she began to spit and choke, and her hesitations on the upward slopes increased till finally, after a gallant struggle, she petered out completely—all vestige of power dissipated and scattered on the night breeze. Fortunately she got me to the crest of a downward slope and by judicious coasting and prayer I managed to bump off the road some yards into the bush and into the shadow of an umbrella thorn.

I got myself organised for the night, putting everything outside except the mattress and blankets. I ate some bully beef, drank some whisky and was thankful for the clear, cold night, as moonlight was visible through pinprick holes in the roof and rain would thus have been hard to bear. I stood by the car in the middle of a black-and-silver wilderness, a gift for the masters of *chiaroscuro*, watching and listening. The sounds of the bush were everywhere, yet you had no idea where; they were all around, in the sky, on the hard earth, among the bushes

and the little trees, which moved as I looked away. Faint howls rising and falling had the hairs prickling on the back of my neck, for the sound of a hyena is always horrific, wherever you hear it. And I was alone. The shadows were razor-sharp, the night breeze whispered and rustled in the thorns suggesting the approach of unseen creatures, slow, careful, furtive. And I was alone.

Little clouds hovered round the moon, little white mice nibbling at a glowing cheese; the bushes continued to move in the light of that moon; nothing was still, but, when I stared straight at any particular part of the bush, nothing moved. I felt the brooding, savage mystery of Africa closing in; I felt it so strongly that I could almost see it, smell it, taste it.

I was alone. In fact, I have never in my life felt so utterly alone. Not a car had passed. I was being watched; I was uncomfortably aware of that and did not like it. Whatever it was that stood or crouched unseen out there in those deep, black shadows would not be wearing boots; it would come very silently. I shivered—I like to think from the cold, for it was cold.

Knceling down, I opened my suitcase to find a jersey, glancing frequently over my shoulder. Is there something faintly incongruous in the picture of a nervous twentieth-century man, burrowing in a twentieth-century suitcase quite by himself at one o'clock in the morning in such a spot? To me there was, at the time.

Once inside the car with the back secured, I lay on the lumpy mattress telling myself not to be so damned stupid.

But it would have been pleasant to have had another human being at least within hailing distance.

I slept fitfully. Sudden gusts of wind kept rushing at the car and shaking it; a thorn branch tapped and scraped at the window; the hyena came much closer, shrieking its awful eerie shriek; far away another one answered. What was it John had said about the jaws of a hyena?

That they could meet through the thighbone of an elephant?
That would rip the miserable sheeting from a car like so much paper.

Feeling for the holster I took out the little pistol and was comforted by the touch of the steel; my other hand closed round the haft of the second-hand spear.

It may appear to you reading this that my actions were fairly hysterical; perhaps they were, I really do not care; at the time they seemed natural enough. Besides, the small hours are notorious for the way they distort and magnify the smallest of problems.

An unidentified bird disturbed the rustling, tapping the silence with a harsh, monotonous call; an unidentified sniffing and whimpering moved slowly round and round the car but, though I sat up to look, I could see nothing, for the moon had gone behind a sombre cloud and the night was black as the pit.

I waited tense for the gurgling howl and knew I should jump out of my skin to hear the sound so close. I shone the torch, but the beam shattered on the glass and flooded back to blind me; the whimper stopped abruptly and I heard it no more.

Uneasily I dozed with one eye open, one ear alert for the scrabble of claws on the paintwork. And what of the dawn, I wondered. With the dawn the sun would rise and scatter these black fancies and I should be able to see the engine, drink some coffee, stretch and yawn and sleep in the shade, watch birds and take photographs.

But just before the coming of Aurora a keen, bitter wind stirred the branches and the blankets, whistling through a dozen cracks. A vague suggestion of light silhouetted the bush, and far away a jagged hill jutted squat and theatrical into the oyster sky.

Out of curiosity I pressed the starter. Miraculously and without complaint the engine responded; encouraged I made a small crackling fire and brewed coffee, sitting huddled in a blanket while the night fell back before the

fierce and instant blaze of the sun spinning on the crest of the jagged hill.

There were marks of an animal in the sandy dust, too small for a hyena; a jackall perhaps or one of the unattractive hunting dogs.

I took to the road. At the border post a sleepy *askari* in a long blue greatcoat escorted me to the little cabin where travellers sign their names in a book; then he lifted the barrier and I drove out of Tanganyika through the morning mists to the hotel at Namanga River with the sun already hot on my face.

A bath and a shave, then breakfast surrounded by splendid adventurous women in slacks and suède jackets, dark red, dark green, seeing Africa by car; their cars were parked beneath the jacarandas, thickly coated in rufous dust, luggage grids stacked high; good reliable beetle cars capable of taking the women through the Congo and back with never a falter.

Remarks flew thick and fast from table to table, flung in jolly, optimistic voices; I listened enthralled.

"No, Jennifer, I'll sit in the back to begin with. No, it's my turn and no arguing."

"The lions won't notice you there, Babs."

"Will there be lions in Amboseli?"

"I jolly well hope so."

"Dot'll be wild when I tell her I've seen a lion."

"But you haven't, not yet. Mustn't count your lions before . . . you know." Gale of laughter; clatter of coffee pots; rummaging in sensible bags for cigarettes. A late-comer arrived.

"Morning, all. How did everyone sleep? I had a beastly bathroom next to me and water doing funny things in the pipes."

"Never mind, dear, you can sleep in the car, I'm driving today."

I dallied over the marmalade so as to miss nothing.

"Well, folks, I don't want to break up the happy

gathering but it's nearly nine and we've still got the bill to sort out." Jennifer seemed to be the leader. I watched as they embarked.

"Mind how you go, Pris. You've got the lunch, remember."

"Anyone seen my camera?"

"It's round your neck." Gales of laughter.

"Bye!" they screamed at the manageress.

"It was lovely."

"Thank you so much"

"Bye!" Hands waving, sun-glasses flashing dully, and they were away churning up the dust. Fortunate women with cars so eager to function.

I sat somnolently in the garden among the poinsettias and the canna lilies in the shade of a tall flamboyant, listening to the chitter-chatter of the budgerigars in their aviary and the drowsy murmur of the river. The day was going to be a scorcher.

Sunbirds flitted among the fantastic blaze of the shrubs and flowers, hovering above the crimson petals—tiny flickering specks of colour, splintering the sunlight into needle points of scarlet and blue and rich metallic green. So much beauty concentrated in so minute a creature; I wondered at the reason for it. A bent and ragged figure shambled along the road carrying a bundle of sticks; he glanced towards where I sat, showing an extremely ugly pock-marked face, and I wondered why beauty on the other hand had so completely passed him by. There must be a reason for that, too. He shuffled across the idyllic scene, marring it and yet in some strange way making it complete.

Beyond Namanga the country altered; the bush thickened, the hills became steeper, the red dust very much deeper, so that the tyres, when they were not spinning in the air, were slithering out of control in what could have been the soft sand of a desert. The corners were more tortuous and more numerous, crawling round the sides

of steep, red banks, serpentine down to the dry cracked beds of rivers, serpentine up towards the staring sky.

I knew from the days in the bus that, if you opened the windows, the dust came rolling in a choking, clinging fog; if you keep them shut, the heat is at once unbearable. Not that it mattered with that car; the dust was thick upon me and upon the food, the cases, the mattress and the blankets. I had seen Vesuvius in eruption during the war and the pink ash which fell from incandescent clouds; this was very much the same. It clogged one's nostrils, stuck in a paste round one's eyes, formed a disgusting gritty film on teeth and body

Cowboy was right; to steer a steady course it was essential to drive at over forty. But for her that was simply not possible, not up those hills. Her steering had never been flawless, her springs were hard and she had no shock absorbers at the back. Now all these things begin to tell on the human frame after a certain time on those roads when every bump is communicated uncushioned and with all the lethal savagery of a vicious punch. Sitting on a row of small explosive charges would be no more uncomfortable.

To take mind off matter there was life to see; flocks of many doves flying up from the sides of the road, and birds resembling hen pheasants scurrying across in front. Eagles sat motionless on the flat tops of the trees. A herd of zebra galloped away in a dazzling compact mass, wheeled to stare at the car as it laboured up another grinding hill, then trotted out of view, trailing their own private dust storm. The slender necks of giraffe waved gently above the trees or pressed horizontal across the thorns as the soft, pale mouths nibbled at the leaves.

But really I had little time to spare for the wonders of the bush as I wrestled with my erratic tin box, a skipper struggling to keep his boat on course through the confusion of stormy seas. On the next slope she began her tricks again, spitting and jerking, losing precious

power, as life itself dribbles from a wound. She stopped. By allowing her to run backwards to the flat and letting her sit idle for a while I was able to get her started. Thus we progressed, like the spider climbing up the side of the bath, slipping back half an inch to gain an inch, slowly easing ourselves across the great hot face of Africa as the sun mounted to its zenith.

Every ten miles or so she stopped for a longer period, no doubt in protest against the outrageous treatment, and on those occasions I had to let her rest for about twenty minutes while I lay prostrate in the dry grass, wondering what on earth had ever induced me to behave like a raving lunatic and buy a car in the first place.

One or two vehicles went by, one or two stopped for their drivers to inquire if all was well.

Towards midday she packed up properly by the side of a high, thorny hill, and that was that. There was no shade from a sun directly above and cruel as a white-hot furnace, and the water with which I could have washed away some of the dust was urgently required in the radiator. I cut hard, splintery branches with the Birmingham *panga* and made a fire whose puny flames were hardly visible in the baleful, unwinking eye of that sun. The food and the coffee tasted of dust; I wondered if anyone else would ever come along; there had been neither car nor bus nor lorry for three-quarters of an hour.

I grilled almost audibly as I got to work on the engine, and very soon lost all resemblance to a human being, what with the skin of oily dust and sweat. A bus rumbled by, full of grinning black faces; then, going south, a small car which slowed, allowing a beetroot face wreathed in sympathy to peer out and say: "Sorry, old boy, got to get to Arusha by three, very sorry."

The car accelerated round the corner. People adrift in a lifeboat who see a ship pass quite close must feel the same. I believe I mouthed abuse, spitting out a kind of red paste. Six giraffes came slowly to investigate, tick-birds

upside down at their nostrils; about fifty yards away they stopped, leaning down across umbrella trees, straining their large soft eyes to make out what I could possibly be. As soon as I moved, they ran off, moving with superb grace, gliding, floating almost, their bodies beautifully marked in perfectly fitting jig-saw patterns of gold and bronze.

With a sudden flash of genius I located the trouble, but found I had no spanner of suitable size and the pliers were altogether too large. I was helpless, hot and fuming, and all for the want of a small length of metal of a certain shape. I sat down to wait. Somewhere some agency, some force in charge of our funny little affairs, woke up to the fact that I needed a spanner.

"That one there, sitting in the dust—yes, that's the one. He's short of a spanner. What shall we do about it?"

"Oh, send him one."

"It shall be done."

A colossal car, crammed with Indians dressed to kill, rushed swiftly round the corner and slammed to a sudden halt. They bundled out, they produced a fistful of spanners and were more than helpful. I blew grit from the most twisty of the fuel pipes; then suddenly they looked at their fat watches, shaking their turbaned heads.

"It is a wedding, you see," they twittered; "otherwise of course we would stay to assist. So sorry, indeed." They waved as they drove off.

But the car still would not budge. I knew she would start with a push; yet who was there within fifty miles who could push? A garish louric bird answered with a loud, jeering cackle.

I fashioned a rough tent from a blanket hung from the spear, the shovel and the door handles. Beneath it I crouched and waited for what the afternoon might bring.

Soon, fed-up with the same view of Africa, I dozed off . . . to wake and find three tall warriors standing motionless, leaning on their spears, quite silent and interested.

Stripes of ochre mud were painted on their narrow noses and heavy coloured rings hung from the slotted lobes of their ears. They wore the same short togas as the warriors of Meru, and at their hide belts were hanging the short bladed *simis* in scarlet sheaths.

"*Abari*," they said sociably.

"*Abari*." I yawned and stretched and got up. With me they peered cautiously into the dead engine. I gave them each a digestive biscuit, then in pantomime suggested they pushed. Sticking their spears into the hard earth, they put their shoulders to the back, grunting and panting; the engine coughed once or twice, then roared; smoke billowed in the sultry air, and the tribesmen laughed hugely, exposing teeth filed to needle points.

In return I gave one of them a lift to Kajiado. He sat on a suitcase bent double by the roof, and the blade of his spear stuck out close by my left ear. Quick furtive glances into the driving mirror showed me the frozen, fascinated expression on his painted, barbaric face as we rushed down the hills and across the narrow little bridges spanning river beds that might have been part of a lunar landscape, they were so completely arid and cracked.

The glare struck hard off the bonnet and off the dry and brittle bush, shimmering crazily among the trees and bushes whenever the hills flattened into stretches of open orchard bush. There was greenery but it was pale and colourless; there was grass but it was tinder dry; there was wood but it was hard and twisted and with little sap in its veins. And over all a fiery heat that hardened the ground to a dusty splitting crust, sucking every vestige of moisture from the earth.

Outside the flaking building in Kajiado my passenger bowed in token of his gratitude and at once set off, back along the road we had just traversed.

I pushed through bead curtains into a dark room illuminated only by the light reflected from the white robes of many old men sitting at the tables. In that room

there was a different smell, a smell reminiscent of the Mediterranean or the Nile, the smell of the sea people, the sea people of hot climes. A totally different odour to that of the land people of Africa. Smelling it, you think of dhows, of little feluccas dancing like flying fish over silver, puckered water; of slavers and of slave markets; of the swift running of outrigger canoes off Zanzibar and the teeming odoriferous ports of East Africa from Tanga to Lamu and north to Mogadishu; of sharks carving through the green waters of the Indian Ocean, and a burnished, brazen sea rolling in to the beaches of Africa.

Romantic thoughts for one eating an unripe orange and sucking gaseous liquid through a straw. Outside, the glare hit against my eyes with an impact more than physical; it was like going from darkness into the gaze of a thousand arc lamps, and outside, the smell reminded of nothing but the fairly recent passage of goats, mingled with bad vegetables and the heavy scent of hot oil.

North of Kajiado the plains of Kenya begin sprawling out on every side, the steppes of Africa, broken only by the squat shapes of a few thorns and acacias, mile upon mile of bronze oat grass rippling below the heat haze, here and there the pencilled lines of green where water flows in the rainy season.

And usually, somewhere in the distant background, the mirage suggestion of violet mountains. The road became more stony and now the dust was whiter, anaemic after the rich, red roads, and you could spot the approach of another vehicle from a great distance by its long white tail.

These are the Kapiti Plains—the home of wildebeest, kongoni and ostrich; giraffe and zebra and many kinds of gazelle. The wildebeest or, to give them their proper title, brindled gnu, stay quite close to the road, only taking fright if you stop, cantering away with flying tails and tossing heads, half-horse, half-cow, grey and wrinkled and bearded, incredibly ugly.

The kongoni (Hartebeest—Coke's) are no beauties either, shoulders dipping down to a low narrow stern, but possessing a considerable turn of speed. Lions have a great partiality for kongoni.

Clusters of tawny dots are the antelope and gazelles: impala, and the lovely little Thomson's Gazelle, the 'Tommies', black-barred along the flanks and with their black tails perpetually flickering with the movement of tiny pendulums. Now that I could see the Ngong Hills I felt the worst was surely over; I dawdled, stopping frequently to use my camera and tick things seen in the little illustrated book of game. There were ostriches, solitary as the trees, just standing thinking whatever thoughts ostriches do think; a couple of secretary birds walked slowly round each other, nodding now and then as though in perfect agreement. A little of the heat was draining from the sun; it had taken on a redder look, the look of evening, and the glare had turned to a softer lilac glow.

The engine was going without a falter and I began to think that perhaps after all I might see Nairobi that day.

The Ngongs rose perceptibly into the distant sky, but though I drove on and on across what appeared to be limitless wastes of grass, they never grew larger, but remained hull-down on the horizon, withdrawing as I advanced.

I passed more cars, at least not so many cars as lorries, careering over the stony road, many of them blowing steam like ramshackle hunted whales.

At Athi River there is a Mau-Mau detention camp and on the slope of a small swelling hill I saw prisoners working under guard, swinging picks and shovels, throwing earth into a truck; high wire surrounded the camp and watch-towers stood sentinel at the corners; searchlights pointed down into the compound where a large concourse of men squatted in the way of prisoners outside the huts, or wandered in twos and threes along the inside of the

wire. These were the hard-core men, not ready yet for conversion to better ways—the men who continue to plan and to hope.

Twenty miles to go—I could almost push her that distance. The hills had taken a sudden leap into the western sky, thrusting up to meet the lowering sun, their rounded crests already black and flat against the pale cauldron of evening. Rattling and bouncing to the crest of the next rise, I saw once again the lights of Nairobi twinkling wanly. One hundred and eighty miles and I had taken exactly twenty-four hours. As I drove into the outskirts of the city, the Mountains of the Moon seemed very far away.

The house of my friends lay on the far fringe of the town and to reach sanctuary I had still to battle through the evening rush. I was indeed in civilisation again. I thought she was going to let me down in the middle of one of the many roundabouts, but sputtering bravely she got me through on to the next straight. A curious technique is observed on these roundabouts; no one gives way to anyone else, a mass of vehicles rush into the maelstrom from every direction, horns blaring, and drivers wearing masks of ruthless determination—they must surely be masks for I cannot believe that, once safely home in the bosoms of their families, they could possibly continue to wear such looks of unparalleled ferocity. The weak and the hesitant and the polite go quickly to the wall. I was back in the mad fight for life, amid the stench of petrol and the taut electric atmosphere of frayed nerves.

I drove at dusk down the short drive to a bungalow with a red tin roof, the same as a hundred others; I did not need to switch off, for the engine had died again, but now it did not matter for there would be a bath and a drink. Clare appeared at the door, smiling a welcome.

"I'm sorry, very sorry, I'm afraid I'm awfully late, but . . ." I began.

"You said today and here you are; we never worry if people don't turn up, not for the first week anyway. Out

here people just arrive when they can make it. When you wrote and said you'd bought an old car we didn't really expect to see you at all."

What a wonderful country, where a week overdue is hardly noticed. No fuss, no wild telephoning, no bother at all. Oh, he'll turn up, not to worry, I expect he's broken a spring or burst a tyre . . . or something, anyway.

"Arthur ought to be home soon. Come in and have a drink."

I was caked red and white with dust, smeared thickly with oil and grease, a cross between a miller and a Sioux and the stoker of an old coal-fired ship. And she saw nothing odd in that either. What blessed freedom!

[20]

LIFE with the Bancrofts was casual, carefree and most enjoyable. The household consisted of Clare, Arthur, and two small fair children full of life and energy; a thin, inquisitive houseboy, a young children's attendant from Madagascar and a pleasant, slothful terrier called Brockway. There was usually at least one other person staying, sometimes two; all in a bungalow built to accommodate a family of three at the outside.

I slept in the outhouse—the lumber room, I suppose you could have called it; beyond the thin partition slept the thin, inquisitive houseboy, a sleeper whose dreams were definitely uneasy, for he would shout out in loud Swahili and gasp and frequently struggle with person or persons unknown. Many mosquitoes lived among the lumber, and little rustling things too shy to show themselves in torchlight. Every other night Brockway entertained friends just outside the door.

Meals were of the movable variety and consisted mainly of cheese and apples, salami and brandy, and could be

had at any hour of the day or night. Dress was informal, plans were fluid, fun unlimited.

Arthur had a job with the P.W.D. (now the Ministry of Works), a job to do with surveying and one which took him into the bush for weeks on end. The jeep that took him on these expeditions stood outside the door; I sometimes wondered how she took him anywhere, for she had only three wheels. But, as you may have gathered by now, life in Africa bears no sort of resemblance to life in Europe, and the lack of one wheel would not worry anyone overmuch. Nothing would worry Arthur overmuch. If a kongoni had rushed through the kitchen, Arthur would have said; 'Why the fuss, Clare? He wiped his feet, didn't he?' In fact I only once saw him moved to irritation—when his immediate boss had read the Riot Act about the question of dress in the office.

"It's all very well on safari, Bancroft, but in the office I really cannot tolerate slovenly dress. I must insist on you wearing a tie and a jacket. After all, Bancroft, though you may not realise it, we have a certain standard to keep up and once we start letting ourselves go, there's no end to it. Never forget we have the natives to consider, Bancroft. No argument, please; this is an order, Bancroft."

"Pompous ass!" said Arthur, slicing the salami.

A frequent visitor was Pierre. Pierre was a White Hunter and I first met him when he joined us in the New Stanley dressed in a thick blue sweater, stained shorts, and with sandals at the base of his bare brown legs. He was tousled, tired and burnt very fiercely by a month hunting crocodiles on the Tana River.

He brought his safari lorry to the bungalow and all his rifles, boats, stores and three tough and wiry Africans. He was exceedingly tough and wiry himself, slim and fair, and his eyes were startlingly blue against the mahogany skin. He was half Belgian. The safari had not been a success. He had only managed to get two crocodiles of any size.

"About four hundred shillings each. The rest weren't worth bringing back." You can apparently only use the skin of the belly in the making of shoes and handbags.

"Never mind," said Clare. "You'll make up for it on your next trip."

"What's it to be next time?" Arthur fed pieces of cheese to Brockway.

"A couple of Dutchmen, after lion. I'd hoped for Americans; they're more generous with what they hand out at the end of the trip. The last lot gave me a rifle and the best pair of fieldglasses I've ever handled. Nice chaps, but couldn't shoot to save their skins. I had to finish off most of their stuff for them."

"And then sit listening to their stories of how they killed a charging buffalo with each barrel?"

"That's about it. In the bar of the Norfolk, surrounded by a crowd of admiring women. What a funny life it is!"

He took us out one evening to the Athi Plain in his large lorry to look for rhino. By rights only a tank could have crossed the ground where that lorry went. The track took us down into deep hollows where shallow little rivers ran among boulders, beneath flat yellow trees and thorns, and where we hoped to see rhino.

"They usually hang about in these valleys." Pierre changed down with a roar and the protesting vehicle clawed its way up to the next strip of plain. Then there was no more track, only thick grass hiding holes and rocks. We walked in the soft evening light towards the Ngong Hills; we saw hyena cubs peering from a sandy burrow, their little bat ears round and black against the white sand, their eyes startled. We had seen the father slinking away on his nightly forage, furtive and sinister, stopping every so often to glance back round his high misshapen shoulder, making no sound. We investigated the burrow, carrying in our hands a starting-handle and a bent crowbar. A powerful stench arose from the hole but we saw no more of the family.

Eagles and buzzards floated as black dots high above the great herds of antelope and we could hear from all round the strange, snoring grunts of the wildebeest. A light wind stirred in the grass, the heat had gone out of the day and it was pleasantly cool. We lay in the grass watching the sunset and the animals, then started back, catching here and there the glow of eyes and pinning a group of jackals in the headlights.

A big bull eland crossed in front, twice his normal size in the dusk; baboons went bouncing away, barking, and all round us, as we bumped and slithered along, the animals prepared for the coming of night. One solitary impala stood on a hillock, in magnificent silhouette against the evening. It was hard to believe that Nairobi lay only five miles away. There had been no other people; no cameras, no cars.

"You had better pay a courtesy call on the Immigration people," advised Arthur. "They like to keep their fingers on the pulse. In fact, since the Emergency they can make things pretty sticky for you if you don't report your arrival. Most people come in by sea and air and are done on the spot. Yes, if I were you, I should go along as soon as possible."

The Immigration officials go out of their way to make a stranger feel very welcome to Kenya. The first thing they tenderly inquire is: "What arrangements have you made for leaving?"

Fortunately I had been warned and had reserved a seat on an aeroplane. But did that suffice? Oh, dear me, no!

"I'm afraid I must see confirmation of your booking." The young man was at least polite. I brought him back a slip of paper signed by the man in the travel agency; for long moments he scrutinised it, then grudgingly said all right, but he must keep my passport till I could produce the actual ticket.

"You are staying for three months. Why? Who with? What for? How much money have you? Show me, please." At Cape Town the Immigration officer had reduced a poor woman to tears with just such a string of questions as these. I did not actually cry, but I got extremely angry, unpleasantly aware that he had the last word for if I shouted or said rude things, then no permit to remain in Kenya. It was all in the pen in his fat, white hand.

By the end of the cross-examination I felt furtive and criminal as though in reality I had come to Nairobi for the sole purpose of blowing up Parliament Building, or to encourage Mau-Mau, or circulate Communist literature among the inhabitants of Race Course Road.

"Supposing I wanted to come out here permanently, would I have to serve a spell in prison before you let me in? Or would it just be a course of brain-washing?" He glanced up, his pen poised above the passport; I thought I had overdone it. But the rubber stamp came down—thud, the pen scratched.

"There you are, sir." A nice purple stamp granting me permission to remain in the Colony for a period of exactly three months. At the bottom was a blurred warning: 'N.B. The holder of this pass may not engage in any employment within Kenya, whether paid or unpaid.' I wondered for quite a while about the unpaid bit; it did not seem to make much sense. In fact it still doesn't.

The trek from Arusha had exhausted the car and already after only a hundred and eighty miles a great number of nuts and bolts needed not only tightening but replacing. Arthur was something of a mechanic and on his first inspection discovered some startling deficiencies. He knew of a garage. I went there and handed her over to a German foreman and a large Sikh.

"One-two hour, yet we do not know." I walked the hot pavements again; I sat in the hot public gardens; I

drank coffee in the New Stanley Hotel, surrounded by a lot of other people drinking coffee; many of them ate little cream cakes. It seemed quite the thing to do at eleven in the morning.

"I think we found the trouble," said the foreman when I went back. "She need a new petrol pump." I bought a new petrol pump.

"We must fit and try it. One hour, two hour, I do not know." More coffee and a ham roll. More walking on hotter pavements.

"She ready and she go like a bomp." She got me back to Arthur, but only just, spitting and choking. A little light lunch of salami and cheese and brandy then back to the garage. I dozed in the public gardens.

"This time we *do* find it." The foreman held up a small stone. "In the pipe from the tank to the pump. Come, now we try her." We roared round a circuit of some four miles, round and round, till I knew that part of Nairobi inside out. The engine sounded more healthy. The foreman was delighted. "Now you have real safari car."

She got me back to Arthur with never a hesitation. To celebrate we went to see *War and Peace*, a mammoth spectacle guaranteed to take one's mind off the stench of garages and greasy cotton waste.

Next day I ventured with her into the Game Park and, thinking to see more wild life, I left the main road and bumped down a grassy track leading into a thicket of thorns. In the middle of the thicket she broke down. I could hear the distant hum of passing cars; a small aeroplane buzzed overhead. I remembered that visitors were expressly forbidden to leave their cars. However, in the depths of that shady thicket I was hidden from Wardens and the like. The situation had the makings of a dilemma. There was no reason why the car should repair itself. Soon I should get hot and hungry and would have to walk from the thicket to the road. A man had bogged his car in the Game Park, spent the night in it and walked for help in the

morning, throwing stones at a lion on the way, and narrowly escaping with his life. Some large animal was moving in the tangle of bush, quite close to the car. A giraffe appeared, tearing lazily at the thorns; encouraged by his presence, for he seemed a friendly creature, I got out. The bumping of the grassy track had loosened something in the engine. I tightened a few nuts. She went. The giraffe went, striding through the thorns. Back on the main road among the grand cars with ciné cameras poking from the windows, the exhaust pipe fell off beside a dozing gnu. He leapt from his dusty hollow bed and away, snorting his acute alarm, tail flying, hooves thudding on the plain. A group of ostriches stood in earnest discussion, their flat snake-heads nodding; the noise of exhaust bursting free broke up their conference in long-legged, feathery confusion.

I limped to the garage like a wounded, bellowing animal, but the dropping of exhaust pipes is too common an event to cause comment. You see any number of beautiful cars trailing bent and twisted pipes done up with wire as though their innards were tumbling out through some dreadful hernia. As I sat in the sun outside the garage listening to the clatter and clangor of metallic surgery, the thought began to infiltrate that perhaps my purchase was not such a bargain after all. I mean, what was I, in fact, seeing of Africa except the inside of garages? At this very moment Miss Howitt was probably leaning on the deck-rail of a river steamer remembering all the fascinating sights she had seen since we had parted at Arusha. My confidence was shaken. The Mountains of the Moon seemed farther away than ever. I wanted to meet people other than a succession of mechanics. Moodily I threw stones at a derelict hulk with no wheels, yet another vehicle beaten to a standstill by the Dark Continent.

"You need a change from that car," said Arthur. "We'll go flying." We drank our beer in the Flying Club surrounded by men in Air Force blazers, quite a number of whom sported top-heavy Air Force moustaches bleached

and dusty. A crowd of small aeroplanes stood waiting outside the hangars. Every now and then the men with dusty moustaches finished their beers, hitched at their shorts, strode out to the runway, climbed aboard one of the little aeroplanes and flew away, up into the burning sky. It was all very casual.

I sat behind Arthur, strapped tightly to my seat. The aircraft was absolutely minute and shook all over as he tried out various knobs and levers. We wore no helmets or goggles and even on the ground the wind of the propeller tore at our hair. He taxied the Chipmunk to the far corner of the vast field, raised his arm dramatically and we were off, faster, faster, into the warm, flowing wind. Bumpity, bumpity, bump, then no more bumps and we were airborne. In a large airliner you get no impression of movement, no real feel of being free of the earth. But in a very small, open aeroplane you feel surprisingly free of the earth, at times almost too much so.

Arthur was a dashing pilot. We swooped and dived and banked steeply above the Masai Plain, above the toadstool huts and the tiny cattle, wooden toy cattle. Far away to the south, Kilimanjaro glistened above the haze. I searched the northern sky for Mount Kenya but saw only cloud. Below were dotted black and white and brown cattle; herds of wildebeest; the flicker of midget zebras running in their dust-clouds. Over the Ngong Hills the machine was flung about in gay abandon by disturbed air; we flew round and round till I began to think that something had stuck, banking sharply round the green summits. The sides were slashed by the dark shadows of ravines, dotted lower down with clumps of palms. We had hoped to see buffalo moving on the slopes but saw no sign of life and sped away along the line of the Rift valley. After a while Arthur turned for home. I would have liked to continue for hours, flying about up there in the sunshine. We came in over the race course and the red-roofed bungalows of Karen, each with its own minia-

ture garden, its own suggestion of exotic suburbia. We swung towards the field and swept in low above the main road, seeing pinpoint faces gawping up from a bus. The noise of our descent slammed back at us from the side of a hangar, the grass rushed past in pale golden blur, the wheels touched, we bounced slightly two or three times, the slip-stream slackened, the brakes squealed, and once more we were earthbound. In a small way I had begun to understand the fascination, the freedom, of the upper air.

"When you next come back, we might hire her for a long week-end and nip down to Mombasa."

Next morning I had got twenty miles outside Nairobi *en route* for Ngobit when I noticed my camera was missing. Still the car was giving of her best and the setback was nothing to worry about. I tore back along the tarmac towards the city, rejoicing, as I often did, in my independence.

"Is your car broken again?" asked the oldest Bancroft child.

"Certainly not." I saw no one else and was away in a flash heading north on the Fort Hall road. Three hours later they unhitched the tow-rope and the little German foreman was scratching his head in bewilderment.

"How difficult it is! What can there be left to go wrong?"

"What indeed?" I was absolutely filthy again. One of the Sikhs drove me to the Bancrofts in a garage van.

"Hello," said Arthur. "Back already? Just in time to come to the races. Grab some salami, wipe off some of the grease, and come along."

"Is there any possible way I can let them know at Ngobit?"

"Oh, I shouldn't bother about that; nobody worries out here."

"I know, but I did say today."

"If you've really got it on your mind, we'll find you a policeman on the way to the races and see if he'll send a wireless message."

We travelled in a compressed mass in his baby Fiat, he and Clare, one child and myself, whizzing along past crowds of Africans hurrying to the races on bicycles and on their feet.

"Ah, there you are; he'll do." A police officer was getting into his car.

"Heh!" shouted Arthur. I got out and approached. A young freckled face looked out under its dark-blue uniform cap, not best pleased at being 'hehcd'.

"Excuse me, but I'm in a bit of a fix," I explained.

"Life or death?" he snapped.

"I beg your pardon."

"Is it urgent?"

"Well, no, not that urgent."

He rubbed his chin. "Fraid it's not on. What's the name of the place again?" I told him. Arthur pressed the horn of the Fiat impatiently. "They've got a post office. Why don't you send a telegram?" Because a telegram takes longer than a letter, and that often takes about a week to reach the farm. He grunted.

"Hey!" shouted Arthur again. "Tell him the first race begins in ten minutes."

"Look here . . ." began the policeman, feeling for the door handle. Clare looked out smiling sweetly.

"It's all right; my husband's bilious today." Arthur hated policemen. That's how it is in Africa. No telephone, no telegram, no communication and a furious policeman into the bargain.

The horses I backed at Nairobi Races ran no faster than the ones I back anywhere else, but the grass was greener and the poinsettias round the paddock were very gay, and it was possible to get a good view of the parade without the usual jostling scrimmage. An attractive girl joined us, always a welcome moment wherever one may be. We ate hamburgers between races and laid our bets with beery bookies; the colours of the jockeys' silks were brilliant in the sunlight.

One of Arthur's fancies, spurred on by his loud encouragement, romped home in fine casual style.

"Splendid!" said Arthur, "we'll have a party tonight, show you the fleshpots of Nairobi."

The first fleshpot was Greek and gave us a delicious meal served by a short, stocky African bursting to join our conversation. The attractive girl from the races was with us, small and dark and vivacious; the evening promised well.

The second fleshpot resembled its counterparts in London or Paris or anywhere, the minute floor packed with hot, over-excited couples thinking about and hoping for that which they could obtain with considerably less fuss and expense in the privacy of their bedrooms. The band was excellent and favoured the rhythms of South America; the heat was very noticeable. We spent the greater part of the night there, getting to know each other better. Then we moved on to the third fleshpot: a larger, more ornate and emptier passion-parlour where a colossal dog lay across one corner of the dance floor and howled vigorously whenever the band played anything approaching jazz. The proprietor joined us. He was a thin man with a hollow alabaster face, hooded, depraved eyes, and much gold in his teeth.

"For a long time this place was multi-racial and full every night, but no whites used it, of course. Now I've stopped all that and made it more exclusive." So exclusive in fact that only two other tables were occupied.

"It'll take a little time to get it going again. Rome took more than a day to build, so they tell us. You might pass on to your friends how you enjoyed your evening with us. Tell them no coloureds come here any more; then they'll flock back. I've spent a fortune on the décor, but it's worth it to attract the right type of guests." He unhooded his eyes at the attractive girl, turning on the depravity, flashing his golden smile.

"Stop it, Danniboy!" The dog bayed to the stars painted on the ceiling of midnight blue. Arthur yawned

enormously. They must have sprayed the air with some mysterious soporific for we all in turn yawned enormously. Discouraged, he went away. We drank pints of black coffee to keep back the advancing tide of sleep; Danniboy howled and there was a slight scene in the hall when a party of our dusky brothers attempted to force an entrance.

I fell on to my camp bed as the houseboy rose from his blankets beyond the thin partition and the mosquitoes fled before the dawn.

Two hours later I left for Ngobit. The day was clear and hot, the glare unpleasant and the dust tasted of whisky. But the foreman and his Sikh had done a good job on the engine; it almost purred. For the first hour I drove taut and keyed up as a playwright who waits for applause or abuse, my ears like little sails to catch the first sound of a sputter or a hesitation. If she stopped, then I stopped, this was no day for coping; out with the luggage, unroll the mattress in the back, and let the future take care of itself.

The country was flat and ugly; sisal grew in spindly forests for miles on end and streams of natives shambled along both sides of the road, urbanised natives in European cast-offs, not a happy lot. I clattered northwards thinking of the attractive girl.

I reached a road-fork at the end of the tarmac and found signs pointing to Fort Hall along both roads. I spun a coin and took the left fork. A mistake as it turned out, for I got on to what must be one of the worst stretches of road in all Africa. Often, until I had learnt how to counteract the deep dust and gravelly stones, the car was hopelessly out of control in nasty dry skids on the countless hairpin corners. The colour of the dust and the little fields and the dried-up river-beds grew richer and redder; the car took a fearful battering on the long steep hills and the gravelly stones were turning to gravelly rocks. The steering system was visibly weakening, what the experts term 'brake-fade' was setting in. I passed pitifully few vehicles.

At Fort Hall I drank tepid beer and watched two dreary Afro-Asians in tennis-clothes playing darts in the bar of a seedy hotel. Many sullen black men sat on logs in what appeared to be the main square. Children drew their fingers along the dusty flanks of the car; I thought sadly that she was beginning to look her age.

Next stop should be Nyeri, but I had to break my journey before then to assist at an accident. With a crowbar we pulled a buckled wing from off a torn tyre while a desperate little man nattered in the midday heat, nearly in tears, and his calm young wife comforted three small children inside the damaged car.

"We've *got* to reach Nanyuki by this evening and now, good lord, we'll never do it, not with these wheels." The other car lay upside down in a maize field at the bottom of a long slope; its driver nursed a cut scalp and cursed unceasingly, and the sun struck down without much mercy. In Nyeri I told the sad tale to a black youth at a garage.

"Yes, *bwana*, I understand and will go to help quickly." The White Rhino Hotel provided welcome coffee. I sat on the veranda near a stage settler whose huge white moustache was heavy with soup and crumbs; his Sunday paper gave him little pleasure and the glass on his table leapt from the pounding of his great red fist. "The whole damned business is intolerable!" he kept roaring.

In the empty bar a grey-haired woman conversed volubly with a fat green parrot. I washed out my mouth with coffee and brandy, then took the road for Thomson's Falls marvelling that the car was still mobile. On one specially vicious bend I lost control on the corrugations, dragging the poor side of the machine along a wall of hard-baked earth and scarring the paint from stem to stern.

In the late afternoon I stopped on a wide plain, got out and lay in the whispering grass, looking across the open bush to Mount Kenya wrapped in plump white clouds—

Kerinyaga, the home of Ngai the Rainmaker, God of the Kikuyu; the wind sighed across the plain and brought the soft call of doves on its skirts. A car approached and stopped. "You all right?" This time I could answer smugly, yes thanks.

Soon on my left I could see the bluish shadow of the Aberdares; the hills were softer and more rounded as they flattened into the rippling plains of the White Highlands. Wired fences ran for miles and miles through the brown grass, and eagles perched on the rough wooden posts, staring with their proud yellow eyes into immeasurable distance.

I passed Ngobit police station, then, surprisingly, a car filled with lovely girls in headscarves. The farm could not be far now. But the road unwound itself for ever, on and on, an endless rutted ribbon on to which the exhaust pipe kept falling. As I got out to replace it for the eighth time, the first drop of rain exploded on my head and thunder rolled among the black clouds piling over the Aberdares. I drove the last few miles through a lashing wall of rain that drummed on the bonnet and dripped through the roof, turning the dust to paste, then to slimy slithery mud.

The way to the farm led down into a deep hollow; brown water rushed along the sides of the road keeping pace with the moving car. But as I saw the house for the first time, so the storm gave way to sunlight stabbing earthwards, brilliant against the thunderclouds, and spotlighting the farm in a watery pool of light.

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THE farm lay among the foothills of the Aberdares at an altitude of some seven thousand feet, the hub of a twenty-thousand-acre estate cut into huge, irregular strips of

shimmering plains by many deep valleys running out from the mountains as ribs from a backbone.

From the window of my room, I looked across a small lawn, a low yellow wall, roses, lilies, and past a group of jacarandas to where the dark green of distant bush climbed into the mountains. There were usually two or three dogs on that lawn and often a fair, sunkissed baby crouching beneath a linen hat. Water from the irrigation furrow fell into a concrete pool with a pleasant, soothing splash; birds called, insects murmured, butterflies hovered.

The house was two-storied and quite unlike my idea of a long, low Kenya farmhouse. On the roof was the tower built during the Emergency, topped by the big spotlight which could sweep the wire and probe the dark shadows of the surrounding trees and bushes. Traces of the wire still remained, rusted and half-buried in undergrowth, reminder of violence and fear. Listening to the happy laughter and cries of the workers on the farm and seeing the roses gaudy in the molten sunlight, I found it hard to believe that there had ever been such a time of suspicion and sudden death. A deserted police post rotted on a nearby hill.

We had our supper, John and Lilemor and myself in dressing-gowns, from dishes kept hot by the big, blazing fire; the houseboys brought it in, then bowed themselves from the room and out of the house. That also was a relic of the Emergency when settlers had been betrayed and murdered by trusted servants. A cosy, restful habit.

"I don't employ Kikuyu if I can help it, certainly not in the house. Those chaps are Kipsigis. They hate the Kukes, but then most tribes do." They moved about the house very silently in their blue *kanzus* and round, white pillbox hats smiling in a friendly way; I wondered what they were thinking.

"Is it still going on?" I asked.

"Up there, yes." John nodded towards the curtained window. "There are a few hundred of them in the forest still, no one knows exactly how many. But they don't

cause trouble any more, not at the moment that is."

John was my cousin whom I had not seen since romper days. Thin and brown and soft-spoken, in no way resembling the hard-drinking, hard-swearing settler of popular fancy. His wife Lilemor was fair, good-humoured and efficient—a person to meet the most appalling crisis with calm good sense. In the war he had flown high-altitude Mosquitoes, so I suppose to him seven thousand feet was nothing. To me it was, and on the first day as we drove to the highest parts of the farm to see the sheep I felt immensely tired within the tight band encircling my skull.

We drove in a 1928 Morris over rough tracks diving into the precipitous valleys, through thick-forested bush, climbing on to the next plain over the boulders and rain ruts. I pestered him with unceasing questions: about the habits of game; about the trees and the bushes and the animal droppings on the tracks. Were there rhino? Were there lion? Were there buffalo? What was this, what was that? When would the rains come? Did elephant still live on the farm? He answered me fully and patiently and taught me a lot on that first day. I learned how the oat-grass seeds get into the fine creamy wool, boring their way through to the pink skin with tiny, barbed points; I saw the weekly *posho* distributed to the Turkana women in their little tin shacks on the plains; and I went on asking questions, surrounded by swarms of flies and pot-bellied infants.

The Merino sheep grazed under the eyes of Turkana herdsmen who stood to guard their flocks in the way of storks on one leg, leaning on their broad-bladed spears and watching the fringes of the bush for the appearance of leopard or hyena or hunting dogs.

Above us the sun hung in a sky of violet blue. John never wore a hat but always dark glasses and suffered no ill effects. A slight breeze sighing across the seas of waving grass was cool on our skins and in the shade of the valleys it was not really so very hot. For a while we lay in the

grass tempting tarantula spiders out of holes in the dry earth: a simple sport consisting of poking a length of grass into the hole and clicking your tongue while withdrawing the grass slowly, enticing the hideous creature into the open. Then we went to the valley of the treehouse, a broad, peaceful spot embracing yellow acacias and great open spaces of white sand, surprising patches of emerald grass, and the salt lick not far from the treehouse. We climbed the tall tree into the tiny observation cabin.

"This is the Sanctuary. Nothing is allowed to be shot here. It's not exactly another Treetops; no royalty ever comes to watch the trumpeting lords of the jungle nor is there hot and cold laid on for sweating tourists, but it's rather a splendid spot in the evenings and early mornings."

On the way back to the car I saw my first wild buffalo; six of them clattering over a dried stream-bed. In my ignorant excitement I chased them, stalking among the little bushes, inching across the open spots, hoping for a good photograph. The gods look after fools and I got very close. The animals were caked in mud and their hides were shiny with bald grey patches while one of the cows was almost white; only the bull looked as though he might be capable of living up to the reputation of the African buffalo. He thrust his head forward into the breeze and stood utterly still listening, his huge horn-bosses bleached and scarred. I suddenly realised that if he were to turn his head there was nothing between us save a very threadbare bush and, remembering another appointment, I eased away, feeling dreadfully conspicuous. John said nothing, but the head herdsman, Kiboi, had plenty to say.

"He wants to know if you're in the habit of doing that sort of thing. If you are, he doubts very much if you'll live long enough to enjoy your visit to Ngobit." Kiboi was a hunter, a stocky copper-skinned man with Masai blood who knew the ways of buffalo, and his pale-brown eyes said quite clearly: "You may be a great white *bwana* but you are also plumb-crazy."

Kiboi had killed a charging leopard with a spear, but to go scampering in the open after buffalo with only a camera—oh, no! That was indeed too much! And, of course, it was. "If that had been a lone bull, the *bwana* would be a heap of bones." A quaint way of describing a sad accident.

"Lilemor and I," John added, "once walked here in the moonlight. Mad, I know, but wonderful. One afternoon we met a rhino at about twenty feet; we had some friends with us and scattered like shell splinters. I fell flat on my face in a puddle but he went after someone else so I only lost my dignity. If you're ever charged by a rhino, don't try to run; let him get close and then jump out of the way. He'll go steaming on for about a quarter of a mile, then wonder why he hasn't caught up with anything and turn to come steaming back again. It's wasted effort to try and dodge a buffalo; make for the nearest tree and pray."

We ground slowly up an impossible ravine. John continued: "A rhino dearly loves a car to upset, more of a challenge, I suppose." He told me how, returning from dinner on a neighbouring farm, he had met a party of buffalo massed across the road—"perfectly enormous in the headlights"—transfixed by the light.

"When I stopped, not by choice I may say, they came to investigate, snorting and sniffing and banging into the car for quite some time till they got bored and went about their sinister business." I listened with envious fascination; nothing like that ever happens at home.

I went to the local *ducca* with Lilemor to collect the post, driving on the road to Thomson's Falls, across more open plains. Here and there little conical hills stuck out of the grass, topped with green, sacred to the Masai who considered there was a giant snake in each summit grove. These were the plains of the Highlands, glare-bright in the day, golden in the evening. Grass, grass and more grass, one or two umbrella thorns, here and there a straggly line of sisal; cattle roaming behind the fences and

herds of 'Tommies' browsing quite near the road. It was evening as we drove home and the blackness of storm lay heavy on the mountains, but the sun still burnished the rolling hills and struck hot on the dry and dusty land, shining from the feathers of the eagles on the fencing posts.

The summit of Kerinyaga speared through the clouds to warm itself briefly in the last of the heat. It is useless and probably pointless to attempt to describe my feelings as I looked across that magnificent country; certainly, at the time, words would have spoilt the moment completely.

Kiboi disapproved of lone expeditions and raised his eyes to heaven when he saw me set out to explore the valleys of Ngobit, armed with a Turkana spear. The blade was extremely sharp and I spent a long time throwing it at a square of paper to perfect my aim. Later I graduated to a perfectly colossal rifle and felt more at ease in the thicker parts of the bush.

The valleys were very steep, scored by the tracks of game and littered with the droppings of rhino, buffalo, and lesser fauna; in the bottom of these valleys along the little streams the cover was close and dark, and sinister as a graveyard at night. But at least one was out of the sun and the liquid one exuded was that of high excitement rather than heat.

Rhino scuffle their droppings into the base of the bushes in a most sanitary fashion. The legend—in Africa there is always a legend—runs like this: An elephant met a rhino one day. "Look here," he said sharply, "you know damned well that I'm the biggest animal in the bush and as such the only one allowed to use the public paths as a lavatory. Get it out of sight or there'll be trouble." No wonder rhino go about with chips on their shoulders.

I followed the Buffalo Road, sidling along, hardly daring to breathe, stopping frequently near solid trees. With a stifled snort and terrifying crashing of undergrowth a large black shape leapt to its feet and away into

the shadows. I mopped and wished I was sipping gin on the lawn. The spear seemed curiously inadequate. The road led into the Sanctuary and thankfully I shinned up the ladder into the treehouse where I could relax. Waterbuck and chestnut impala moved along the far side of the valley, and buffalo, including the white cow, came to the salt lick. One of their number stood always as sentry with outstretched head and twitching nostrils. It was very quiet except for the sound of their hooves on the stones and the occasional sharp call of a bird; the yellow stems of the trees glowed darkly in the searing midday sun.

In the late afternoon I went slowly back to the farm across open plain, my legs swishing in the long bronze grass, and on the way I bravely threw my spear at a vanishing snake.

Every day I went out, going farther afield, covering many miles between morning and dusk, learning much, watching, listening, creeping along the tunnelled paths in the tracks of buffalo feet, leopard feet, eland feet. Once I got within a few feet of a solitary eland bull as he stood within a shadowy clump of thick bush and the first thing I saw was a large, liquid brown eye, then his head and heavy grey dewlap. He was munching and tearing at the leaves, contented and unsuspecting till I softly hissed. The eye widened, the jaws froze, in mid-munch; neither of us made a sound. He turned towards me and if I had been carrying a stick I could easily have scratched his nose. When he ran, he ran silently for so big an animal, his barley-sugar horns held high.

On my wanderings I met baboons, colobus monkeys heaving themselves through the trees, waterbuck, bushbuck, buffalo, duiker and wart-hog; I heard the sounds of many animals that I had been too clumsy and noisy to approach, and on many occasions I knew perfectly well that I was under observation from unseen eyes or being smelt by unseen nostrils. But no matter how far I went, I never saw a rhino.

In the old days before the Emergency there had been lion on the farm but they had moved away, scared and bored by the continual movement of jeeps and trucks through their preserves. The only ones I saw were penned behind the wooden bars of a local game farm. In one case there was a family newly captured: a lioness with her cub and the lion, black-maned and raging, the hatred in his eyes truly appalling as he flung himself against the cruel confines of the cage. A cheetah prowled in circles on the end of a long rope, more graceful than anything I had ever seen, and a chimpanzee bounced about wearing a felt hat; half-tame rhino fed among the cattle, but it was not the same as meeting them unexpectedly and un introduced in the wilds.

Here and there on the lips of the valleys were concrete water-troughs for the cattle, filled from streams far below by thudding rams driving the water up through thin pipes.

"A headache, those pipes," said John. "The elephants tear them up and use them as knitting wool, and the Mickey Mice tore them up and made Heath Robinson guns. Oh, yes, African farming's fraught with interest." (For the uninitiated, 'Mickey Mice' was the code name for Mau-Mau.) "Some bright lad in Nairobi thought we would fool them if all messages used the cartoon phrase; rather absurd really." He laughed. "Large body of mice, estimated numbers, one zero zero moving east, etcetera. We always felt tempted to lock up the cheese and take on the services of a really reliable cat."

Leopards and hyenas abduct your sheep; lions your cattle or, if not lions, then rinderpest or tick fever. Badgers murder your chickens (we sat up all night waiting for a honey-badger which must, by his method of entry into the henhouses, have been equipped with a hacksaw, blow-lamp and boring brace); the oat-grass seeds ruin the wool of your sheep and elephants wander over your maize, helping themselves on a lavish scale. On top

of all this, nature is often unkind: drought dries up the land, or rain makes the roads impassable. The herdsmen are unpredictable, not usually among the world's top brains, and require constant supervision to avoid disaster. African farming is very definitely fraught with interest.

But the cattle were not confined at night within stockades as in Rhodesia; they were kept behind the scanty protection of a barbed fence till dawn, when they were allowed out to wander across the plains, to graze or to seek the shade of scattered thorn-trees during the wicked heat of the afternoon sun. And as the cattle go out, so the game withdraw to the shelter of the thick bush, where they lie secure till the evening light begins to fade.

"We'll have a look for a rather tiresome old bull buffalo that's been tearing up the furrow. He comes out just as it's getting dark and is as cunning as sin." John carried an uncertain torch and we set out towards the mountains as the daylight turned to dusk. For a while we messed about among the thick dark clumps of bushes and little grass clearings. Every shadow turned itself into a buffalo, every sigh of wind into a snort.

"This is about the time he comes out." John grabbed my arm, we froze into palpitating statues. From the darkness to our right came the sounds of snuffling and tearing grass. John put his lips to my ear and breathed: "It may be him. All set?"

I slipped forward the safety catch, turning to face the sounds, raising the heavy barrels. It was too dark to see the sights.

"Use it like a shotgun." The noises ceased as if the unknown stood like us, striving to pierce the night, to hear the slightest sound, catch the slightest scent. Buffalo are pretty nippy on their feet, I remembered, and he had not far to come.

"Right, I'll shine the torch." I got the butt in my shoulder. The light snapped on and there at the extreme limit of the wavery beam stood a huge, pale shape, the

head facing us and luckily lowered. I fired. A yellow sheet of flame tore apart the night, blinding me, and the roar of the shot was gigantic. The shape had dropped, pole-axed, without a sound.

"Well done, indeed!" We advanced warily. The head moved slightly. "He may get up, better give him another." The flame and noise slammed again,† the silence. "Watch out, they're tricky devils. He may be feigning dead." I fired once more into the back of the huge neck.

"Congratulations," said John, "I've been trying to get him for weeks. Now perhaps we can patch up the furrow." We went home.

"When I heard the third shot I began to wonder a bit," said Lilemor. "If there'd been another I'd have got the car out."

"He was dead from the first one."

"Isn't it rather . . . well, cheating, to shoot them like that?" I asked.

"From a farmer's point of view a buffalo is vermin, especially when they start doing damage like that. At home you give rabbits disease; here we shoot buffalo any way we can, provided we kill them." At home, I thought, the most dangerous vermin one is likely to meet is a charging rabbit. Perhaps we are no longer worthy of more.

In the morning we went to look at him. In death the bull was repulsive and faintly primeval. The horns were small and chipped and blunted, the hide was scarred and shiny; hyenas had disfigured the carcass; a thick cloud of flies rose from the mangled head. The boys began to cut him into manageable pieces. As at Shiwa, the meat would be very welcome.

I went up to eight thousand feet on horseback with Emuria, the Turkana groom. I had not been on a horse since just after the war and was only wearing thin bush

trousers, but those plains are made to be ridden over and the soreness did not matter. We rode all day in the fierce gaze of the sun, never once in shade; my horse was short of exercise and very spirited, and the sound of the drumming hooves was exhilarating in the extreme. Emuria spoke no English but his smile was happy; he seemed to enjoy the outing.

We stopped to eat our sandwiches on the fringes of the forest, sitting below a spreading tree and looking over an unbelievable view. The heat dancing in dazzling haze over the miles of brazen grass, speckled here and there with sheep and cattle; the clouds above Mount Kenya were fat and white, the only sounds were those of the grazing horses and the barking of baboons as they played on the sheep-dip beyond a green ravine.

I tried to get close and photograph them but they bounded away in line ahead, shouting raucously to each other, stopping now and then to look back at this puffing, menacing thing blundering in their tracks. Then I saw the wart-hog family, lounging in a small clearing in the shade of small, gnarled trees. I could see eight little wart-hogs and one grown up. Having planned my route and set my camera, I went forward on hands and knees, making for a bush on the edge of the clearing. That part was simple, the wind was right, the cover plentiful, and I reached the bush unseen.

Slowly, very slowly, I raised myself to see over the bush, inch by inch. All was peaceful; they were still lounging and rootling. The noise of the opening camera cut through the silence but not a wart-hog moved. I got the viewfinder to my eye and was just about to click when something quite monstrous happened. The whole idyllic scene was suddenly blotted out by the most hideous face imaginable staring straight through the camera into mine. Transfixed, I crouched, my thumb welded to the trigger; the hideous face grimaced in what I could only imagine to be anger, the tiny eyes glinted, the long crescent tusks

lifted with a vicious little jerk, the unspeakable mouth opened—Father was gravely displeased. You must go to a zoo one day and study the wart-hog, then imagine him working himself into a silent fury not more than four feet away; if you are a person of normal sensibility you will understand my feelings. I took the picture and lowered the camera. Without it he looked just that much worse. I have seldom seen an angrier wart-hog. He stamped his foot, the forest of bristles stood up on his neck, then he clashed his poisonous-looking teeth and my nerves could stand no more. I tried a nervous smile but that cut no ice with Father; I began to edge backwards; he pushed his way farther into the bush, stabbing savagely with his razor tusks. I tried my only gambit

“Boo!” I shouted suddenly, waving my arms. Then I took to my heels and ran. The shout had put him off balance and instead of following he gathered his family together and made off. If only the range had been right, I should have secured the picture of a lifetime.

On the way home we met up with them again. Seated on a horse I felt full of confidence and went after the family (‘sunder’ is the correct expression) at full gallop. All I could see of the children were the very tips of their ramrod tails speeding through the grass like periscopes. I was gaining, the wind was whistling round my face, I was yelling with excitement, the horse was stretched out in speed, Emuria was far behind.

Ant-bears dig holes all over the place hidden in the grass. The horse sensed the hole, tried to swerve but was going much too fast. He fell. I carried on at the same speed, describing a magnificent arc through the hot afternoon. I bounced once or twice before finally coming to a dazed stop. Emuria cantered to the rescue—his face one huge grin. No one was hurt and we went on our way, more slowly.

In the evening, by way of relaxation, John took me, bruised and aching, to the shores of a little lake set in the

middle of a plain. The water was the colour of hot metal and absolutely still; crested cranes stood among the bleached rushes, and storks, egrets, herons, widgeon and coots, their bald pates shining pink. Now and then a bird splashed the crimson water with clapping wings. Rain was falling on the mountains and, closer, vultures wheeled above a steep, scrubby hill.

"There's a cave in that hill where the 'mice' used to hide out, quite impossible to see unless you happened to stumble on the entrance. After the Emergency a ridiculous man came up from Nairobi and said it had to be blown up. I told him the place was full of guano and would he at least allow us to collect it. But no, the cave had to be blown up at once, that very moment. I suggested that perhaps the 'mice' were cunning enough not to use the place again now that it had been discovered. But no, it had to be blown up. He and his lackeys staggered up with great loads of explosives, fuses were lit, everything was tremendously square-jawed and efficient. We waited with fingers in our ears . . . nothing happened. One of the more panicky lackeys had tripped over the fuse wire on his way out. Well, anyway, after a lot of bad-tempered shouting the cave disintegrated and buried all that lovely guano. He had his orders, you see. It is the altitude—it addles our brains, I think."

The cranes and egrets and storks stood in their placid little lake, careless of the nasty ways of men, dozing in the last rays of a sun going down as it had gone down for millions of years, now and then splashing the darkening waters with clapping wings. We drove back through the evening shower. After supper we dolled ourselves up and drove thirty miles to a very friendly party given by the local policemen.

Emuria was a great one for the girls, a black Casanova with laughter in his eyes and lust in his mind, who saw

and conquered and went away swaggering to look for fresh prey. But one day he went too far.

I had been out searching for those elusive buffalo and did not get back till dusk, to find the place in an uproar, and friend Emuria lying under a blanket ash-grey and shivering. For some time he had been paying court to the wife of a pit-sawyer, a seductive, provocative piece with gyrating hips and long, black eyes. When passing her on the path to her hut, I often found it best to look the other way. Emuria used to wait till the sawyer was sawmilling, then hurry along to the hut where the girl would be waiting; all was going well, everyone content, till this particular day.

The girl swayed along the path in her clinging, flimsy coverings, throwing glances over a bare, velvet shoulder; her lover followed some way behind, casually as though bound nowhere special. She vanished into the hut and waited. The groom reached the tree by the hut and whistled to the girl; she answered from the gloom within; as usual all was well. He stepped forward. At that moment the figure of the sawyer hurled itself down from the tree where it had been waiting, *panga* whirling. He took care not to kill Casanova, only to hack him nastily about the legs. We took him to the hospital at Nyeri and with him we took the sawyer and the wife and her small baby.

"No, *bwana*, no, not him, he will kill me on the way," Emuria implored between chattering teeth.

"Don't be a bloody fool, of course he won't kill you. If he does, shout and we'll stop." John was angry. It was a long way to Nyeri and back in the dark.

Emuria was deposited at the hospital, playing up desperately, rolling his eyes and groaning.

"Now we've got to get rid of these two," said John. We tried the police, we tried everywhere. No one would take them. They had no passes, you see, no permits. "But it's only for tonight, tomorrow they'll go back to the Reserve."

John implored in vain. The night dragged on. The sawyer and his erring wife sat expressionless in the back of the truck waiting for something to happen, quite silent, gazing at nothing. At last we met a merry policeman, on his way home from a party.

"Delighted to help, old boy, absolutely delighted. Come along and we'll shove 'em in the compound." We were guided to a smart aluminium hut lit by electricity. The walls were gay with pin-ups and pictures of the Royal Family. Two bearded young Africans lay on cosy little beds. "Converted Mau-Mau, learning to be clerks," said the merry policeman.

"Well, well, tame 'mice'. Whatever next?"

They brightened at the sight of the wife who responded at once with skilled wiggles of her body.

"Glad I'm not spending the night in here," said John. "There'll be trouble if that goes on."

We were pleased to get home in the small hours.

"A couple of days off" wouldn't do any harm. I think we'll go round the mountain." I wondered sleepily if that was the same as round the bend. It *is* the altitude, you see!

[22]

ROUND the mountain meant round Mount Kenya, a two-day journey—Nanyuki-Meru-Chuka-Embu and back to Nyeri, roughly two hundred and fifty miles of red, cork-screw roads; on the stretch between Meru and Chuka a traveller had to negotiate no less than ninety sharp hairpin corners in ninety-three miles, down into steep gorges, across small bridges spanning black rivers, through tropical tracts of palms and bamboo, beneath gigantic, grey trees, along the sides of terraced hills where the dust is coated on the vegetation so that one drives through pale red forests.

The road to Nanyuki led straight and white across the open thorn country, and on each side stretched the great cattle ranches behind endless fences with eagles on the posts.

John had business in the town and I sat in the car on a dusty square watching the business of Nanyuki go by. A tough, bearded old man parked his lorry next to the car; on it was a cage containing a cheetah with large, frightened eyes; he stumped to the post office, a pioneer figure in faded shirt, shorts, brown jackboots and a bush hat upturned in front. Just beyond the lorry a flat-chested woman gave her husband hell in shrill, staccato bursts, and a lean girl in full riding kit walked past smacking her dusty boot with a hunting crop, trailed by a fat overheated Sealyham. A number of black soldiers marched about, holding themselves well.

On the way to Meru we skirted the southern edge of the Northern Frontier District; a range of mountains vanished northwards into the hazy distance, towards the deserts bordering Lake Rudolf. If the heat had not hung like a curtain from the sky we could have seen two or three hundred miles. In my mind I marked down the Northern Frontier District for a future visit.

At Meru we stayed the night at a hotel with the unlikely name of 'Pig and Whistle'. Why not 'The Scarlet Flame Tree' or 'The Sacred Lake'? No doubt it reminded nostalgic inmates of pints at the local and the sound of ball on bat in the warm summer evenings of England. A painted elderly lady regaled us with spicy stories of the Happy Valley over coffee in the residents' lounge.

"Of course," she sighed, "things aren't what they used to be, oh, dear, no! Much quieter now, really almost sedate." She stirred her coffee, staring into the fire, remembering the old days when men were men and women . . . ah, the women.

"They were lurid days, but fun, definitely fun." Her face had the hard shine of a porcelain mask and she did not dare to smile; a mass of beads and necklaces rattled loudly

when she moved; only her greenish eyes still seemed alive. Her words conjured up the vision of Kenya so often portrayed in highly coloured novels—a vision larger than life, with emotions enlarged, passions furiously unleashed against a background of heat and height and the ruthless, relentless pressure exerted by Africa. I sat spellbound, my coffee untouched.

And all this in a hotel called 'The Pig and Whistle'!

We slept in the car and moved off at dawn on the journey of the ninety-three corners. At Embu we lunched in the olde-worlde atmosphere of 'The Isaak Walton', watched over by a woman shivering and feverish with Asian flu; pictures of fish and fishermen hung on the dark-stained walls; a large plaster trout leered glassily from between two sporting prints. There was no character to regale us with improbable stories. We were glad to leave the unfortunate woman to her disease and reach the sunshine again.

In the evening we came to 'The Outspan' at Nyeri, having seen no more of the mountain than swirling wet cloud. The hotel gave us each a comfortable little grass cabin and a bath to wash away accumulated dust; it had, also, an excellent bar in which to dally, and an air of opulent grandeur not entirely expected in the depths of the bush. The clientele, however, was disappointing: ordinary families with ordinary children talking furtively in the usual way of people in a large room full of silent waiters. No men in hunting kit swapped loud yarns about the denizens of the bush . . . "Then, thank the Lord, I got him with my second barrel." . . . "One of the best bloody lions *I've* ever seen." . . . "Cartwright? A snake got him on the Kinangop."

No, we heard nothing like that. Only: "Billy, if I have to tell you to sit still once more, you'll go straight to bed without any supper." Sickening really, but the food was delicious.

At sunrise we walked to the little cemetery and from

there, standing by the grave of Lord Baden-Powell, we watched the sun come up from behind Kerinyaga and saw the white glistening peak flanked by the twin pinnacles quite free of cloud. And that moment was worth all the miles, the dust, the heat and the discomfort. If the trip to Africa had been a failure, that moment when the sun appeared above the mountain would have made it worthwhile.

Twenty-five giraffe leaning their necks on the thorn trees quite near the road on our way home made the day complete.

The sands of time had been merely dribbling away, unnoticed and unheeded, but now suddenly they began to pour, the trickle became a flood, and I knew it was time to move on—to the Mountains of the Moon. I did not want to leave, any more than I had wanted to say good-bye to Shiwa, but already I had lingered too long.

I had reached the lower fringes of the Aberdares many times but had not yet ventured into the gloomy recesses of the forest. Every day I used to watch the clouds come down over the mountains and every day I felt the mystery, the dark spell of the forest stretching out beyond the wall of trees, enticing me into its depths as though to savour illicit joys.

“You can go by car to the sheep-fence,” said John. “And if you start before it’s light you ought to get up to ten thousand feet long before the rain arrives.”

Long bars of pale pink ivory were drawn across the Eastern sky by the time I reached the sheep-fence. I drove the car to the edge of a valley and left her in the shelter of bushes. Dogs were barking from the Turkana encampment and a woman’s voice shrilled in the silence. A hyena howled one last long-drawn howl before the dawn.

Short of the forest edge I stopped to breakfast off biscuits and water, feeling the warmth of the day the very moment the sun climbed into view; with the sun, eagles rose into the sky, and baboons appeared to play at the sheep-dip. The mists evaporated in the mounting heat and revealed the plains as a burning flood; on the grass the dew sparkled for an instant before melting into water. I dropped the heavy cartridges into the breech and, shouldering the rifle, set out along the buffalo trail which led towards the forest, slowly climbing into the heart of the mountains, moving carefully in case of some laggard bull, solitary and bad-tempered. By the spoor that I had found I thought I was not more than half an hour behind a buffalo. Half an hour earlier and I might have seen the long black file crossing the plain, making for their secret haunts.

The path wound through dense plantations of young firs and then began to climb beneath great silent trees, immensely tall, their stems naked and grey, their bases shrouded in thick undergrowth of a splendid green. The silence was absolute save for the piping cry of an invisible bird and the distant echoing call of some animal; it was a brooding spot and the path was churned deeply by the hooves of innumerable buffalo. Little side-tracks led off into jungly bush, horribly suggestive of ambush.

Farther on, sunlight cut through the massed foliage, glinting in pools of ochre water on the path, touching the undergrowth with spots of paler green, pouring down the creepers. But for the absence of insects it could have been an open tract of the Malayan jungle. There were many signs of rhino. I plodded on, up and up, and could see nothing but the almost impenetrable ceiling of the trees, the signs of rhino becoming more and more frequent . . . and fresher. But the first living creature I met in the Aberdare Forest was not an armour-plated pachyderm bent on murder but a very small hyrax bustling along the path towards me. A hyrax is a cross between a rabbit and a fat guinea-pig with the most piercing voice; when

they give tongue in the trees at night it is a chorus of crazed souls, for they grunt and squeal and shriek in the maddest abandon.

He was silent and preoccupied, allowing himself no more than an occasional snuffle; I stood quite still on the path and when he reached my boots he stopped, regarded them closely, wrinkling his little black nose, then shook his head slightly as though in disbelief—‘These things surely cannot be what I think they are’—and hurried on his way. High above, a colony of colobus monkeys hurled themselves from branch to branch like flying skunks; two birds drew attention to my presence with a concentrated outburst of chittering, but I was soon out of their realm, following the soup-plate spoor of an elephant among the first clumps of bamboo.

The bamboo proper begins at nine thousand feet, gradually thickening till there is room for little else. The elephant had turned off down a side-track and behind him the bamboo had closed, leaving no trace of his passage. I was moving much more slowly now; the rifle had become an intolerable burden and my breathing was perceptibly shorter and more difficult. I had been climbing for two hours. Though the sun was mostly hidden, the heat was bordering on discomfort; the path was softening and turning to red mud, the undergrowth below the tall bamboo was sodden; nothing, it seemed, ever really dried up there.

Sitting on a damp log at the fork in the path, I saw an old bully-beef tin lying in the leaves—the first and only sign of human life. What was left of the Mau-Mau lurked in the bamboo. Like animals, John had said, and smelling like animals, wild-eyed and partially mad, bearded and with their hair in awful spikes, some going half on their hands and knees in the way of beasts, one gang clad in leopard-skins; existing in the cold, drenched bamboo for week after week, month after month. And it was in the bamboo that the patrols had searched and waited and ambushed.

“Very unattractive it was, too, squatting under a

groundsheet all night without a fire. All you could hear above the noise of the rain was the chattering of teeth. Our people were only doing it for about a fortnight at a time and probably had a decent camp to go back to. The 'mice' stuck it without proper camps, I sometimes wonder how. Not that the town 'mice' went much on that sort of life. It ruined their smart shoes and snap-brim hats. Oh yes, we came across them now and then; once we even captured an elderly 'mouse' curled up asleep in a large ant-bear hole. Sometimes there was a fight, perhaps at dawn. You can imagine what it was like in the half-light, everyone blazing away in thick bamboo, shouting and yelling." I remembered an incident something like that in Malaya—utter chaos.

"Now and again they met an angry 'mouse', a fanatical 'mouse' who would go for people with his *panga* even when he'd been hit by God knows how many bullets. But usually they all went scurrying off. We had an Elgeyo chap with us one morning, armed with a bow and arrow, when we stumbled on a nest of 'mice'. Away they went zigzagging madly; the patrol let drive with Stens and pistols, nobody fell over till the bowman whanged his little arrow and got a damned great 'mouse' right through the back of the neck, just like that."

A callous description? Perhaps. But then Mau-Mau was a callous cult. I met a policeman who told me of some of the incidents he had come across; they were unbelievably horrible; as time went on, the oaths administered became ever more bestial and revolting.

I kicked the bully-beef tin farther into the leaves and continued along a path growing narrower between the walls of overhanging bamboo. How very glad I was to be wandering alone in peace and not in command of men at war. The bamboo thinned at one point and allowed a view across a shallow valley filled with genuine jungle, above which floated wispy trails of mist; I caught sight of distant peaks, not so very far above, and dark clouds

hovering. The going was more difficult, the path had deteriorated into a slimy red quagmire snaking between high banks, and a sudden wind rushed through the tinfoil leaves. But it was still too hot.

A pair of bushbuck met me at a corner, barked nervously and flashed out of sight. The wind blew harder through the treetops; I was puffing badly and longed to throw away the rifle. My feet were those of a deep-sea diver's, leaded and anchored to the mud at every step. Then I heard the rain—an ocean breaking on a distant, rocky shore. It caught me on the way down, cascading from a sombre, murky sky, and the clouds swept through the trees, turning the heat to a sodden, bitter cold, the forest to a dim, dank underworld.

Back on the plains the sun held sway. I stripped off my clothes to dry and lay exhausted in the shade. Then I ate some biscuits and drank some tepid water; the glare was wicked, the view superb; the plains moved and undulated as the surface of a lazy sea. Ostriches played, running round in ever-decreasing circles, and a small brown bird sat on one of my boots chinking softly.

The mountains were by now completely blotted out, but the clouds fell back from the scorching touch of the sun and could advance no farther.

I lingered on the way down to the farm, plunging into the shade of a little valley, following game tracks; I wandered among the sheep—'Jambo' to the herdboy, mutual smiles . . . the limit of our communication, I tried in vain to find the leopard-trap; I saw Elsie, the tame eland which ran with the cattle, and heard the tinkle of her little bell. Frequently I sat down to rest. At last, after sunset, I reached the house.

"There's a cable for you," said Lilemor. "It came this morning. We thought of trying to catch you in the van but decided to let you have the day in peace."

Reading the contents I was very, very grateful, for it was my last day of wandering. A bleak reminder of home

reached out to tear me from the sun and the plains and the buffalo trails. I put away the rifle.

"It looks as if I'll have to go to Nairobi and see about an earlier aeroplane," I said, trying to pretend I was talking about someone else.

"Kenya will still be here," said Lilemor, "it won't run away."

"Next time you'll find your buffalo." John smiled. "He'll be waiting."

We walked through a wind that might have been blowing over hot coals, between rows of empty shell-cases set in concrete, to the aeroplane squatting on the runway at Benina. And although we had been together for a day and a night and half a day we did not speak much but merely hid ourselves and our thoughts behind dark glasses, climbing each in turn up the steps into the sweltering machine.

As we strapped ourselves in, the man beside me said: "One thing, it won't be so bumpy over the Med."

The aeroplane rose into the spotless blue sky, flattened out above Benghazi and headed for Malta. Peering down past the edge of a slightly tilted wing I saw the line of the surf on whitish sand, the dark shadows of the seabed. A few rocks stuck like black pimples from the shining sea, then there was nothing, nothing but greeny water, and Africa had vanished into her own shimmering haze; Africa was already a memory and the propeller blades whirling in the air with their deep and steady roar were dragging me remorselessly back to reality.

And the dreams—what of the dreams left behind like the loose ends of a shapeless novel? The Mountains of the Moon, the Serengeti, the leopard in the hills of Shiwa and the buffalo I had tried so hard to find?

They will all be there, one day they will all materialise. Africa will not slip beneath the waves. Africa has patience, she will wait.

THE END

